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The Ecumenical Studies Series is an occasional publication of the Council on Christian Unity, bringing to the attention of members and friends significant materials on ecumenical issues. Single copies are distributed to members free of charge. Additional copies are available at cost. Membership is \$3.00 per year. Robert Tobias, editor.

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THEOLOGY OF MISSIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ECUMENICAL STUDY COMMISSIONS

By ROBERT TOBIAS

THE COMMISSION on the Theology of Missions is one of several Disciple commissions created in the past four years to give concerted attention to prescribed areas of ecumenical study.

The commissions presently at work are as follows:

Theology of Missions (jointly sponsored by the Council on Christian Unity and the Division of World Mission, UCMS), Joseph M. Smith, chairman;

Our Common Christian Responsibility Towards Areas of Rapid Social Change (jointly with the Department of Social Welfare, UCMS), Walter Sikes, director;

Biblical Theology, William Reed, chairman;

Baptism, W. B. Blakemore, chairman.

Other assigned topics:

Statement of Basis of Membership, World Council of Churches;

Institutionalism and Church Union;

The Church and Judaism;

Prevention of War in an Atomic Age;

Theological Issues in Union Conversations;

Proselytism, Christian Witness and Religious Liberty;

The Nature of Unity.

The Commission on the Lordship of Christ over the Church and the World (Wm. Moore, chairman) has concluded its work with the presentation of a document to the World Council Studies Division.

Each of the above commissions and assignments is related directly to a corresponding study in World Council, International Missionary Council, National Council or Disciple unity programs. A brief sketch of those programs will suggest some recent trends and the variety of relationships and of action in which Disciples are engaged.

The World Council's commission on *rapid social change* has spent four years in intensive research and analysis of specific situations in Asia and Africa, convened a world consultation in Salonica last summer, is preparing two volumes to relate findings to local churches for action.

The World Council's *theology of evangelism* study has ten years of work behind it, has now produced a forty-five page analysis and requested member church study and comment.

Faith and Order has several standing commissions (*Worship, Tradition and Traditions, Baptism, Institutionalism*, et al.) which claim our personal and denominational participation.

The Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council worked through a document on the *theology of mission* and has released it to member bodies for study and revision.

The World Council/International Missionary Council has drafted a preparatory study document, "*Unity, Witness and Service*," for the next Assembly and asked for member church review and comment by May, 1960.

The United Bible Societies and World Council together are working on a two-fold study of "*the place and use of the Bible*" and the meaning and implications of *Biblical theology*.

The National Council's secretariat for Faith and Order studies has just initiated a series of projects, including "*The Ecclesiological Significance of Councils of Churches*." Several other departments of the World and National Councils have depth studies underway in relation to their respective areas of responsibility.

These are some of the studies which involve us in a variety of ways and which claim our earnest attention. Among these, the *Theology of Missions* is urgent and of far-reaching consequence.

The purpose of the Disciples' *Commission on the Theology of Missions* at the time of its creation was described as follows:

Purpose: A critical re-study of the theology of missions in the light of recent theological thought and ecumenical developments. The commission will be expected:

- (a) to explore theological roots underlying critical issues presently before the Division of World Mission and to suggest foundations requisite for a theologically sound mission program;
- (b) to participate on behalf of the Brotherhood in the present ecumenical study in this field sponsored by the International Missionary Council/World Council of Churches and to examine such specific issues in that context as may be appropriate; and
- (c) to help stimulate the Brotherhood to deep levels of theological understanding of our knowledge of God and our urgent privilege to proclaim His love to the whole world.

The Commission has met twice. The papers which follow were read at the second meeting of the Commission, and are presented here, both to inform the Brotherhood concerning the way the work of the Commission is developing, and to solicit the participation of a larger group in this study process. Ministers, professors, students, laymen are invited to work through these materials along with the Commission, and are particularly urged to contribute their comments, criticisms and suggestions to the Commission for its ongoing deliberations. To be most helpful, comments should be received by early March.

The Commission meets again in April, and has projected a longer range program of work, described briefly by Prof. Smith in this publication, p. 6ff. It is assumed that as the work of the Commission proceeds, other materials will be published from time to time with the expectation of broader participation by those interested.

Members of the Commission at present are Prof. Joseph Smith, chairman, Prof. Wm. R. Baird, Jr., Mr. William Barr, Prof. M. Searle Bates, Mr. George Beazley, Mr. Wayne Bell, Mr. Walter D. Bingham, Mr. Leonard Brummet, Prof. James Clague, Prof. William Hall, Dr. George Earle Owen, Mr. Glenn Routt, Prof. Oliver Read Whitley. Consultants of the Commission are Dr. Carl Belcher, Dr. Irvin E. Lunger, Dr. Donald McGavran, Dr. Robert Nelson, Dr. Margaret Owen, Dr. Donald Salmon, Dr. Virgil Sly, Dr. Robert Tobias, Dr. Mae Ward, Dr. Donald West.

ISSUES AND INVOLVEMENTS OF DISCIPLES OF CHRIST IN A THEOLOGY OF MISSION

By JOSEPH M. SMITH

WHEN Disciples of Christ began serious and sustained foreign missionary effort the creative period in their re-statement of the Christian faith had long since ended. Their early leaders had sought answers to basic theological questions; what is the Gospel? and, where is the Church? The answers they framed provided early Disciple preachers and laymen with a forthright and deceptively simple message. Equipped with this message they carried out a highly successful mission to nineteenth century America. By 1874 when formation of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions signalled the real beginning of their overseas missionary endeavor Disciples were a self-consciously separate religious body whose heritage was already formalized and institutionalized in characteristic patterns of thought and structure.

The launching of their foreign mission effort did not stem either from any recovery of the apostolic fervour of their founders or from a new or distinctive insight into the nature of Biblical faith. It expressed rather the growing sense of responsibility at being one of "the major American religious bodies." Other denominations not as large as the Disciples were engaging in extensive foreign missions; Disciples must do their part in the conversion of the world! The general upsurge of missionary fervour associated with the late nineteenth century revival movement within American Protestantism was a part of the stimulus which launched the Disciple missionary enterprise. Mingled with the pietistic, evangelical passion to convert the world to Christ as a basic motive was the sense of manifest destiny which marked the Anglo-Saxon world of that day. Missionary endeavor was informed neither by a recovery of the Biblical conception of the "world" nor by any clear understanding of the actual situation in the non-Christian lands. For Disciples as for other Protestants, foreign missions was merely the projection on a global scale of the mission they were already conducting with booming success to Christendom.

Far from being regarded as a recovery of their heritage Disciple missionary effort has been under continual attack as constituting an abandonment of that heritage. If one looks upon the

Disciple heritage as being essentially a rigid Restorationism which sees the Gospel as a five-step plan of salvation and the church as a New Testament-ordained structure in which local congregational autonomy is ultimate and basic, then the charge can be substantiated. At every critical stage in the development of their missionary effort the strict Restorationist concept of their heritage yielded to a more dynamic and open viewpoint and, in every case, the action was justified not on theological grounds but on the basis of practical expediency.

Founders of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions and the Foreign Christian Missionary Society consciously abandoned the principle so fervently and ably expounded by Alexander Campbell himself that the church alone is the only legitimate missionary institution. They were simply coming to terms with actualities for up to that time many Disciples had held two mutually contradictory viewpoints—that the church is the only legitimate missionary institution and that the church is essentially local. Experience had demonstrated that foreign missionary effort could not be systematically carried out by purely local church action. Organizers of the missionary societies insisted that these organs were "agencies" and not the church—mere expedients through which interested individuals and churches could get a job done which otherwise would not be done.

Serious involvement in the gigantic task of converting the world quickly led Disciple missionaries and administrators into co-operative ventures with Christians of other denominations. To Disciples who believed they had restored the one New Testament church this action was tantamount to an abandonment of their unique position and acceptance of a status as one denomination among many. Again, defense of the action was practical rather than theological. Its substance was the contention that strict Restorationism would not work either as a means of converting the world or of re-uniting the divided church. The only means available, both to the union of Christendom and to the conversion of the world, was that of cooperation among existing denominations.

Finally, when a church began to emerge on the mission field its leaders began to ask again the fundamental questions, What is the Gospel stripped of its Western (including Disciple) accretions? and Where is the Church? They were not satisfied in every instance with strictly Restorationist answers. The younger churches

and the missionary societies thus became the storm centers of the "open membership" controversy. Again, the discussion remained largely on the level of the practical and the expedient and appeal was made to such principles as individual liberty of opinion and congregational autonomy while the bitter, polemical character of the controversy made any fundamental theological endeavor virtually impossible.

The consequences flowing from these features of the Disciple foreign missionary enterprise which we have sketchily noted are especially relevant to any consideration of a theology of mission for Disciples. They may be briefly summarized. Because they did not begin their foreign missionary endeavors until they already had the "answers" to the basic theological questions which their founders raised, Disciples have not really re-opened these questions for serious theological consideration since they launched their missionary enterprise. Reflecting as they did the general outburst of missionary fervour among American Protestants in the launching of their missionary efforts, Disciples have been largely imitative in their theory and practice of mission. The fact that the missionary enterprise has been a continuing storm center of controversy between the strict Restorationists and the advocates and administrators of foreign missions has made most Disciple utterances on missions polemical and pragmatic. Thus, throughout the history of their missionary enterprise a necessary preoccupation with the question, *How* can we get the job done? has precluded any serious attention to the fundamental theological question, *What*, after all, is the mission?

Now, the whole Western Christian missionary enterprise is being called in question both from within and without the church. Along with other Christians, Disciples can no longer avoid the clear call to serious, sustained and systematic thought concerning the ground and nature of the Christian world mission. Fundamental questions demanding relevant answers are being put by a whole complex of developments that are a part of the radically new environment in which the world mission of the church must be conducted in our time. Some of the most obvious of these are:

Resurgent non-Christian faiths and fervent national, racial, cultural movements in traditionally mission lands challenge with new intensity the validity of Christian missions. This calls for a fundamental reconsideration of the ground of the Christian world mission to rid it of

involvement in Western imperialisms or superiority feelings of any sort.

Younger churches express growing initiative and independence by entering organic union with non-immersionist and non-congregationalist bodies in Japan, Thailand and the Philippines. Their action calls for a rethinking of the Disciple viewpoint on the nature of the church and the path to unity.

The growing involvement of Disciples in rapidly expanding ecumenical mission enterprises and participation in ecumenical conversations looking toward a greater measure of unity call for a new understanding of the relationship between mission and unity and a new examination of the goal of the Christian mission.

The relative sterility of some fields in contrast to the seemingly unlimited possibilities for immediate growth in other mission fields demands a theologically valid answer to the question of the relationship of results to motivation in mission effort in terms of which limited resources can be deployed.

Demands for an organizational re-structuring of the Brotherhood that will help to keep the whole church in a relevant encounter with the realities of a changing environment raise questions of a fundamental nature such as the relationship of a missionary society to the church.

All these developments, and more, put to every Disciple the question: What is the meaning of our Disciple heritage for our missionary vocation today? The question has a peculiar urgency for the missionary or missionary administrator who must make decisions that are not merely practical or administrative but essentially theological. He must often do this without any real guidance from the church of which he is a representative. The question is especially urgent, too, for Disciple members of younger churches who are facing the opportunity and necessity of participating in union negotiations with representatives of other churches. Again, they often do this without any real resources of preparation from the Brotherhood that would enable them to make a creative contribution to the discussion of the basic issues in such an encounter. Actually, however, it is not merely missionaries, administrators and members of the younger churches but the entire body of Disciples who are called by our common involvement in the mission

of the churchless and changing world to a new era of serious theological endeavor.

The Commission on the Theology of Mission sees its work as one small but significant aspect of the Disciples' acceptance of this call to theological effort. It brings together in systematic study and conversation pastors, mission administrators, missionaries, theological students and seminary professors. The Commission is undertaking an examination of our missionary heritage, our current mission enterprise in its various involvements and contemporary ecumenical thinking on theology of mission as a part of its task. Primarily, however, it is engaged in a serious re-study of the Bible in the faith that the Holy Spirit will lead Disciples of Christ into the truth necessary to guide our missionary obedience in this time.

In its first meeting in the fall of 1958 the Commission laid down the main lines of its introductory studies. These became the basis for papers which were presented and discussed in the second meeting of the Commission in October, 1959. These papers represent the three aspects of the Commission's responsibility as defined by those who called it into being. First, we began our examination of the Disciple heritage in the theory and practice of mission. This seemed to be the natural place to start in helping "to stimulate our brotherhood to deep levels of theological understanding of our knowledge of God and our urgent privilege to proclaim His love to the whole world." Second, two papers were presented which examine the theological presuppositions underlying the "Strategy of World Mission" from the standpoint primarily of the understanding of "church" and "world" expressed in that document. Here we were undertaking our task of "examining critical issues before the Division of World Mission and suggesting foundations requisite for a theologically sound mission program." Finally, we heard and discussed a paper representing a Disciple reaction to the World Council of Churches' study document, *Theology for Evangelism*. At this point we were trying to "participate on behalf of the Brotherhood in the ecumenical study" now being sponsored by the IMC/WCC in theology of mission.

The Commission recognizes that it needs to continue work in each of the areas with which these papers deal. At the same time, it is now apparent that a comprehensive structure is called for within which we can begin systematically to examine the great variety of issues and questions which have been suggested in the

course of our study and discussion the . . . structure
might well include the following main div . . .

Introductory : The role of theology in the life and
mission of the church

The source of the mission

The object of the mission

The agent and authority of the mission

The practice of the mission

The end and goal of the mission

The Disciples of Christ and mission

It is hoped that before its next meeting in the spring of 1960
some preliminary work will have been done on the first two of the
topics in this proposed outline.

The Commission on the Theology of Mission is committed to
systematic study and conversation as responsible ways of listening
to what God will say to His people. It is our hope that the results
of our initial efforts herewith presented may prove helpful to fel-
low-Disciples and other Christians who seek with us light on the
question, What is the mission to which God is calling us?

DISCIPLES' THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF MISSION HISTORICALLY CONSIDERED

By OLIVER READ WHITLEY

Professor Whitley's paper is written as a critique of an extensive study by Professor Joseph Smith of the development of the Disciples' concept of missions. While Professor Whitley's paper picks up the main points of Professor Smith's study, the editor felt it would be helpful to the reader to have before him a comprehensive précis of that study. We are grateful to Dr. Donald West for preparing the following précis:

The intent of Professor Smith's study is to test the thesis that those who played a major role in shaping the character and destiny of the Disciples of Christ were concerned primarily with the conversion of the world to Christ and to examine their writings to determine if their content forms an essential contribution to the theology of mission. Primary attention is given to the thought of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, W. K. Pendleton, Isaac Errett and J. H. Garrison. Other sources are the writings of men such as Walter Scott, Barton W. Stone, D. S. Burnet, A. McLean and Stephen J. Corey.

The thought and practice of Disciples in the area of mission is found to fall into three periods. The first covers the formative era of revolt and re-statement of the Christian message from 1804 to 1849. The second is the era of development and organizational structuring from 1849 to 1949. The third period began following the end of World War II when Disciples entered with new seriousness of thought and action into the emerging ecumenical era.

I. THE ERA OF REVOLT AND RE-STATEMENT, 1804-1849

Concern for the Conversion of the World

This creative, formative period began with the appearance of the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery, came to a climax in the Campbell-Rice Debate, and ended with the first general convention in Cincinnati, when the American Christian Missionary Society was formed. The conversion of the world was the great concern behind the questions raised by early Disciple leaders: "What is the Gospel?" and "Where is the Church?" By their answers these leaders denied that the faith and preaching of contemporary Christendom constituted the Gospel and that the existing churches could be regarded as the church. Alexander Campbell asserted that the conversion of the world was the object uppermost in the thought of the Reformation which he had helped to create. Walter Scott declared: "The results of our movement will finally be the unity of the brotherhood and the universal conversion of mankind." The basic orientation of the early Disciples was around the insight that the church exists for the conversion of the world, and that mission, therefore, constitutes the essential nature of the church. These early leaders invariably linked mission and unity, holding that *Restoration of primitive Christianity is the key to the conversion of the world at the same time that it is the clue to the unity of the church.* Restorationism is the substance of soteriology as well as of ecclesiology.

What is the Gospel and How Does it Save? (Soteriology)

If soteriology is the clue to ecclesiology in the mind of the Disciple leaders it is even clearer that Christology is the key to both the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of the church. The Gospel which both saves and unites is essentially the historical fact that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God. "*The belief of this ONE FACT, and submission to ONE INSTITUTION expressive of it, is all that is required of Heaven to admission into the church.*" (A. Campbell, *Christian System*, p. 130). For Walter Scott the most singular mark of the "Reformation" of the Disciples was recovery of the insight that the fundamental proposition of the Gospel is: "Jesus is Messiah and Son of God."

From this conviction that the Gospel is fact, and that the Bible is the sole authoritative witness thereto, sprang the Disciples' resistance to any extra-Biblical creed as a condition of salvation and entrance into the church. Also, since the central fact of the Gospel is a unique act of God, the Christian religion is essentially supernatural, and cannot be grounded upon natural theology or any other product of human reason.

For the Disciples the divine elements in the process of conversion are: 1) the fact that God has made Jesus the Messiah and Son of God; 2) the testimony to this fact contained in the divinely inspired Scriptures; and 3) the confirming witness of the Holy Spirit when this word is preached. The human element in the process, aside from the proclamation of the Gospel which is always of necessity a human act, involves faith, repentance and baptism. These three are inextricably woven together in a unity in all early Disciple interpretation of the process of conversion, through which, according to William Robinson, "the Churches of Christ have made their greatest contribution to religious thought."

Given their concept of the process of conversion and of the nature of the church, baptism of believers only by immersion is inevitable and necessary, as witnessing to the acceptance of the authority of Christ. Submission to baptism is not all; citizenship in the "Kingdom" involves a whole new manner of life in which love is the regulatory principle.

The conviction that the Gospel is exactly suited to man's nature and condition has expressed itself in the consistently held position that the correct proclamation of the pure Gospel cannot but result in the conversion of men. In effect, success becomes the measure of the evangelist's faithfulness to the truth of apostolic Christianity. (Over-fascination with this conclusion, which was seemingly confirmed by spectacular response to Disciple frontier evangelism, resulted in a Messianic complex which became an obsession for many of our people.)

Where is the Church? (Ecclesiology)

In spite of the localism and individualism which have marked our movement, one of the basic insights given to us from the beginning is that the church is *one*—and oneness is the antithesis of individualism and localism and of any autonomy other than that of the *whole*....

The Church—a Christocracy

Christology is for Disciples, the clue to both soteriology and ecclesiology. "Christocracy, or absolute sovereignty of Jesus Christ, was the only government

of the church which Campbell recognized" (Lindley). This gives the church its essentially universal character.

The Church—a Community of the Holy Spirit

Christ's authority over the church is exercised through the New Testament, the church's constitution, and the Holy Spirit—the witness of Christ's Lordship. According to Campbell, the resurrection or ascension of the Lord was the definite commencement of the Christian age or institution. The Holy Spirit is given only *after* the coronation of Christ, on the day of Pentecost, and is given only to the church.

The Church—the Kingdom of Heaven

A distinctive mark of early Disciple thought is the virtual identification of the church and the Kingdom of God. The conditions of salvation are the terms of admission into the church. In their earthly dimension, Kingdom and church are identical in law, citizenship and extent.

Church—and Culture

Closely allied with the emphasis upon the Restoration of primitive apostolic Christianity was the firm Disciple resistance to any tendency to stress cultural continuity as forming any part of the church's essential nature. The alliance of church and state, the historic episcopate, Roman Catholicism, infant baptism and the use of creeds as tests of fellowship were all attacked as unscriptural, post-New Testament accretions.

The Church—As Mission

Because they believed that the task of converting the world belonged to the church alone, Campbell and his associates protested vigorously against the usurpation of this task by societies and sects. The task belongs to the whole church. In later years Campbell not only accepted the necessity of delegating the task to persons set aside for the work, but also special administrative arrangements for their selection, ordination and support. Such "ways and means" were justified under the "law of expediency" as "circumstantial"—"not found upon the page of express revelation."

Mission and Unity

The integral relationship of mission and unity is rooted in the conviction that the Gospel which will convert the world is the same Gospel which alone will unite the church. Campbell considered this to be *the* unique feature distinguishing the Disciples from other movements to restore the true church (W. E. Garrison). This is why soteriology is prior to and the clue to ecclesiology in Disciple thought. Disciples have been so enamoured of their insight that the way of salvation is the divine pattern for the church's unity that they have never developed a full-orbed doctrine of the church.

Believing that the Gospel which converts is the same Gospel which unites, the early Disciples insisted that the mission is *one*. The *same* Gospel is addressed to Christendom and to "the heathen." The field is one, embracing both home and foreign concerns. Both pagans and divided believers in Christ are to be reached through *one* mission proclaiming *one* gospel.

The Goal of Mission—The Millenium (Eschatology)

For both A. Campbell and Walter Scott the climax and goal of history is the coming "millenium." R. Fred West believes Campbell was led to accept and endorse missionary societies, an organized religious communion, etc., through a change in his philosophy of history. Popery, skepticism and paganism would be overcome through these institutions in a natural and normal manner, not by Christ's magical appearance upon the physical clouds. Primitive Christianity restored would eliminate both sectarianism and papalism. "Bible societies and missionary organizations would convert paganism to New Testament Christianity." Campbell's eschatology is Christo-centric and church-centric. The restoration of the ancient order of things in the Millennial Church is a necessary preparation for the coming millenium. The Restoration would *bring* the millenium. Preaching the Gospel is a necessary preparation also, and so mission finds an added urgency. Anglo-Saxon civilization occupied a unique and strategic role in preparation for the coming millenium. Campbell's American followers were also believed to have a key role in preparing for or actually ushering in the new era, as evidence of pious nineteenth century, American optimism.

II. THE ERA OF DENOMINATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, 1849-1949

The organization of the American Christian Missionary Society in 1849 symbolized the end of an era and the beginning of a new one, characterized by questions which were procedural and practical. No longer was it asked: "*What* is the Gospel?" but "*How* shall the Gospel which both saves and unites be preached?" Instead of "*Where* is the church?" they asked: "*How* shall the Disciples themselves be the 'New Testament church' among 'sectarian' churches?"

Conduct of Missions

Answers given to the basic questions raised in the creative formative period, making soteriology the clue to ecclesiology and Restorationism the substance of both, caused every question in practical churchmanship to become a doctrinal issue. Inevitably, differences of opinion were generated in what became a long century of controversy and conflict for the Disciples. Three practical questions on the conduct of missions at home and abroad became foci of conflicts:

- 1) How shall the mission to the unsaved be administered?
- 2) How shall the special mission of Disciples to restore the lost unity of the church be carried out?
- 3) How can the Disciples be the apostolic, New Testament church and how can they plant and nurture the New Testament church at home and abroad?

A. To Organize or not to Organize a Society?

The American Christian Missionary Society, a gathering of individuals in no formal way related to the churches, was a clear violation of the principle that the church itself is the only legitimate missionary organization. Campbell insisted the American Christian Missionary Society was a "general convention," the creation of the "whole brotherhood." In defending the new organization Campbell denied congregational independency as belonging to the nature of the New Testament Church. Mutually exclusive and contradictory principles regarding the nature of the church, entertained by well-meaning Disciples,

vexed and frustrated constructive debate and action. The Christian Woman's Board of Missions and the Foreign Christian Missionary Society, encouraged by Isaac Errett, entered the area of foreign missions. Errett defended missionary societies as "human expedients" by which the necessary task of missions could be accomplished. His view prevailed and still characterizes, in large measure, the organizational structure of Disciples' institutions. Those contending for the church as the only legitimate missionary institution and the local church as the only legitimate church, broke away and became a separate body in 1906.

The formation of societies thus led to "fracturing" the church as Campbell insisted, and opened the way for the formation of "independent" missionary efforts on the ground that support of such agencies is a matter of "opinion." Thus it may be seen that Disciples have yet to develop an adequate answer to the practical question, *How shall we fulfill the mission of preaching the Gospel to the world?*

B. *To Be or Not to Be—a Denomination*

Involvement in missions at home and abroad led to the question of uniting with other religious bodies in comity agreements, cooperative ventures and federations, or going on alone in sectarian isolation. Battle lines formed, one group holding aloof from any kind of cooperative arrangement. J. H. Garrison led in favoring comity, cooperation and federation and set the tone in both spirit and thought which has prevailed among the majority of Disciples in the ensuing years.

C. *The "New Testament" Church; The Church or A Church? Restorationism Versus Unity*

Reception into membership of the "pious unimmersed" involved rejecting Restorationism as the substance of soteriology, and has wrought havoc as an issue among us for fifty years. Resolving the issue at home and abroad has resulted in the death of Restorationism as a basic principle among "organized" Disciplesdom. The Commission to the Orient formed in 1925 recommended at the 1926 International Convention in Memphis that the overseas church be given freedom from patterns of Western orthodoxy through the exercise of local autonomy and indigenous creativity in churchmanship. Guarantee of personal liberty of opinion and decision by missionaries have also been vouchsafed through the disavowal of any "ecclesiastical court" by the International Convention or the United Christian Missionary Society. Though Restorationism is dead it is not yet clear what guiding principles will take its place.

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENTS

A. *One Hundred Years of the "True Gospel"—Soteriology*

Few advances were made in Disciple understanding of Soteriology after the initial creative period. The classic "plan of salvation" hardened into a shallow, legalistic technique for soul-saving, with discussions of baptism which tediously harped on the meaning of the Greek word "baptizo."

Isaac Errett and J. H. Garrison tried conscientiously to broaden the doctrine of Holy Spirit beyond the limited emphasis on its activity through the Word, but little was gained by the effort. The dictum that the Gospel is fact

not philosophy degenerated into a mere shibboleth, expressed mainly in a negative "anti-theology bias." Even the emphasis on the Lordship of Christ as the central fact of the Gospel lost meaning through much repetition in popular evangelistic preaching and disputes with "creedal denominationalists." Campbell's Christocracy declined into insistence upon immersion and weekly communion as "Commands of Christ."

The supernatural character of the Gospel revelation as distinguished from all forms of rationalism, natural religion or syncretism was maintained with less conviction and clarity as Disciples moved into the twentieth century. Missionaries, mission administrators and representative Disciple scholars in comparative religion were more inclined to approve or ignore the Theological Presuppositions of the Laymen's Inquiry* than to criticize or reject them, as B. A. Abbott did.

Disciples continued to nourish the illusion that the preaching of the pure gospel would quickly "take the world for Christ," until conspicuous failures in early efforts on the most difficult fields forced qualifications of that view, which had developed amid phenomenal successes in evangelism on the American frontier. Paucity of results in foreign missions inspired troubled critics to accuse hapless missionaries of diluting the Gospel, employing wrong methods, or being below par as effective workers. More charitable judgments focussed upon the barrenness of the fields and the outsized costs of pioneering. The emphasis on "results" forebade any deeper awareness of a Gospel which truly saves.

B. *The "New Testament Church" After One Hundred Years—Ecclesiology*

Predominance of the "practical" in Disciple ecclesiological thinking during the century resulted inevitably in a shift from the point of view which saw a missionary dimension in the total existence of the church toward identification of mission with "missions," and particularly *foreign* missions.

There was an almost imperceptibly gradual shift in the thought of Disciples regarding the relationship between mission and unity during the century. Whereas in the early period the primary concern was "the conversion of the world," and both mission and unity belonged to the essential nature of the church, the main body of Disciples began to think of unity itself as being their mission. There was a tendency to shift the emphasis from the church as *being* essentially one and to promote unity as a means for winning the world to Christ. No longer were Disciples calling Christendom back to the "true Gospel" which both saves and unites—rather the emphasis was shifting to the power of a *united church*. "When Christians are ONE the world can be WON" (Zimmerman). With "cooperative" Discipledom unity had taken priority over mission.

A new dynamism and depth of ecclesiological thinking developed in this period in the theory and practice of the functional church, the ground for this having been prepared by the principle of "expediency," held by Errett and others. Form was to be determined by function, with common sense serving as the agent. The New Testament is "not a statute book, but a book of principles." The functional concept made it possible to reclaim once again at the local level the principle that the church itself is essentially a missionary institution by incorporating world mission into the total structure of the church's work.

* "The Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry" by S. J. Corey.

The practical identification of church and Kingdom of God continued, with varying degrees of fuzziness temporarily obscuring it, throughout the century. Since "advancing the Kingdom" and "building the church" were synonymous, reports of mission work emphasized results in terms of the number of baptisms. However, in stony and resistant fields, other reasons for supporting the work were found; e.g., patiently overcoming the difficulties and intensive development of "native" churches, institutions and leadership. Healing, feeding and comforting the afflicted and not "merely saving souls from hell," were encouraged as minstering "on broad lines" to "human life at large." This type of missions has come under recent criticism by D. A. McGavran, who holds that "church growth" results not from "good works" but from "evangelism." One may generalize and say that this century of grappling with the practical "how" of being a church has resulted in ecclesiology tending to swallow up soteriology, reversing the tendency among early Disciples.

C. *The "New Look" of the Millenium—Eschatology*

Whereas during the early creative period of Disciple history "thought patterns were dominated by eschatology," since 1849 there has been a flattening out of the vertical dimension in eschatology. The sense of urgency and eager expectancy in the earlier expectation of the imminent millenium gradually faded. Man's part in bringing in the promised consummation became more conspicuous in emphasis until it occupied almost the whole picture of the anticipated future, which looked more and more like an Anglo-Saxon Utopia. Foreign missions would help build this "new world," spreading American-style democracy and the Disciples' brand of pure religion as its harbingers.

III. THE EMERGING ECUMENICAL ERA, 1949-

The era of denominational, Western dominated missions is clearly at an end. Disciples, among Protestant Christians generally, are turning from problems of ecclesiastical strategy and politics to fundamental theological questions. Our sins of division, controversy, and irresponsible individualism are being confessed in sincere penitence and desire for deeper answers than we have claimed to know heretofore. We discover that younger churches, within new-born nations, are asking the same questions which brought forth the Disciples as they labored for adequate answers. However, Disciples are now one of the denominations whose faith is a foreign, imported expression to the younger churches, who decry ready-made formal answers, irrelevant and devoid of meaning when lifted from the context which gave them birth. For example, the Disciple emphasis on local autonomy will not be the answer to Christians in isolated minority situations in non-Christian lands. "Baptism by immersion," "open communion," or "freedom from legalistic creed," offered in their "Restorationist shell" are as meaningless and unacceptable to the younger churches as the historic episcopate or Westminster Confession were to early Disciples. The younger churchmen must find in the Bible their own answers in the light of their own situation. Restorationism, believer's baptism by immersion only, anti-creedalism, resistance to theology, and other familiar Disciple "answers," if interpreted as to their *meaning* and *intent*, remain relevant, whereas undue stress on their *form* reduces them to mere relics of our heritage and "collateral in a game of ecclesiastical horse-trading."

The Disciples with their exclusive emphasis upon the New Testament and their neglect of the principle of continuity in history have entertained the illusion of perpetual virginity for the church. The way to the true church is the restoration of the virgin purity of Pentecost. But it is as impossible for the church, once it is born into history, to retain its virginal purity as it is to live in perpetual infancy and still be in relevant encounter with the world. The church's proximate hope must be couched in the symbolism of the birth of Isaac—the offspring of one who is past child-bearing age.

Disciples might well insist upon the appropriateness of the promise implicit in the virgin birth regarding the process of conversion and the planting of churches in non-Christian communities. They might well learn themselves, as a church with a history, to live by the promise implicit in the birth of the son of promise to one already past child-bearing age!

DONALD F. WEST

DISCIPLES OF CHRIST are becoming increasingly conscious of their history. In fact, they have in recent years begun to view their history self-consciously, as befits a group which has now entered the age of denominational status. Disciples of Christ have developed certain characteristic ways of stating the questions which are asked by members of any religious group as it seeks to determine its place in Christendom. For our purposes, it is apparent that Disciples' history has conditioned the frame of reference within which questions concerning both the ideology and strategy of mission in the mid-twentieth century are asked and answered.

So clearly does Disciples' history set the frame of reference for the discussion of contemporary missionary endeavor that it is difficult to separate—at many points at least—the consideration of Disciples' mission strategy from that of Disciples' mission history. This being the situation, the basic question which might be addressed to those who consider the history of Disciples' thought and practice in mission can be stated as follows. *What theological and institutional assets and liabilities has Disciples' history bequeathed to us as we confront the kind of world in which mission must now be carried out?*

The data from which some tentative answers to this question can be formulated are provided in the papers done by other members of this sub-committee: Joseph M. Smith on "A Historical Review of Disciples' Thought on Mission"; Carl Belcher on "Contributions of Barton W. Stone to Disciples' Thought on Mission"; and Donald F. West on "Disciples and the Ecumenical Approach

to the Understanding of Mission.”* From these data it can readily be seen that Disciples are presented by their history with both some assets and some liabilities as they consider what is to be their approach to mission in the immediate years ahead.

I

Joseph M. Smith has in his paper rightly observed that, from the very first, Disciples believed themselves to be engaged in a primarily missionary concern—the conversion of the world. Not only this. Disciples very early concerned themselves with a “theology of mission,” although they probably would not have called it that. Early Disciples asked two questions which certainly are involved in any theology of mission: what is the pure and simple gospel, and where is the real church of Christ to be found in its unity, stripped of its historical contingency? Early Disciples were quite convinced that the answer to the first question could be gotten at by rejecting post-biblical creeds and depending upon the New Testament itself to provide a theological framework within which the conversion process could occur.

With respect to the second question, Joseph Smith argues that Disciples’ positive contributions to the understanding of the nature of the church were obscured by the tendency to accentuate the negative—the polemic against the “sects and the denominations” which existed at the time of Disciples’ origins. What these polemics obfuscated was a strongly ecumenical, universal, social note in early Disciples’ ecclesiology. For early Disciples, the church was first of all a “Christocracy,” a community in which Jesus Christ was the absolute sovereign. It was also a “community of the Holy Spirit,” in which the company of those who have heard and have believed the testimony concerning the messiahship of Jesus live under the aspect of the new dispensation provided by

* The original plan of the work of the sub-committee was that the three papers mentioned here would be sent to the Responsible Secretary who would attempt to draw them into a composite statement for the Commission as a whole. Unfortunately, the best-laid plans of mice and committee members go astray, and the pressure of other duties has brought it about that in preparing this report the Secretary of the Sub-Committee has had available only the paper by Joseph M. Smith. But it is the belief of the authors of the other papers that what they will present in their papers will not in any significant way alter the conclusions based on the material at hand. However, other members of the Sub-Committee are not responsible for any ideas *not directly attributed to them* in this paper and they should not be understood as *necessarily* endorsing the author’s ideas in Sections VII-XI.

the Holy Spirit and available only in the church. Still more, the church to early Disciples was a "kingdom of heaven," in which the only ordinances practiced are those instituted by Christ, and for which the basis is that the kingdom and the church are identical in law, citizenship, and extent. The ideological background for Restoration is provided in terms of this notion. Here also one notes the context within which the opposition to societies and associations could be developed, since after all they were something set apart from the church itself.

Yet even with this evidence of the development of certain ideas concerning the doctrine of the church it must be admitted that Disciples did not do much with a substantive and explicit approach to the nature of the church. Joseph Smith's suggestion as to the reason for this appears to be well-taken. He indicates the hypothesis that *soteriology* was so obviously prior to *ecclesiology* in our early history that the doctrine of the church was not fully developed in Disciples' thought. In fact he suggests that, for early Disciples, soteriology was the crucial clue to ecclesiology and Restoration was the substance of both, to the extent that every practical question became a matter of doctrine.

II

As Disciples' history proceeded, the emphasis gradually shifted from the first question—what is the gospel?—to the second question—where is the church?—and to some important accompanying questions—how does the Gospel get preached? and, how can a church be a New Testament church? In the decades from 1849 to 1949, Smith suggests that Disciples appear to have agreed on at least the following five points: that the conversion of the world is a legitimate task of the church; that the Gospel which is to save the world and the Gospel which shall unite the church are one and the same; that the mission of the church is the proclamation of the Gospel; that the heart of the Gospel is the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; that the true apostolic church finds its only source in the New Testament. But in this century there remained three issues which have exercised the faithful continuously. These issues are, first, how shall the mission of the church be administered? Involved here is the practical matter of whether, since it is believed that only the local church is authorized in the New Testament, societies for the furtherance of mission are to be allowed. The second issue was, how shall the special mission to re-

store the lost unity of the church be carried out? In another form, this question might be stated as "to be or not to be a denomination?" The third issue dealt with was how Disciples could be an apostolic New Testament Church. Here the basic question was—the New Testament church, *a* church or *the* church?

III

Each of these issues is so crucial for setting the context of the current discussion of mission that some greater detail should be noted concerning it, for the purposes of this report. Joseph Smith's suggestion that the principle according to which the church is local only is a product of the early anti-ecclesiastism and localism of the American frontier seems eminently sound. The frontier conditions out of which Disciples emerged placed a heavy emphasis upon "local options" of all kinds.

If one may employ the frame of reference of the sociology of knowledge here (and I do not see how it can be avoided) he is entitled to entertain the suggestion that what Disciples found in the New Testament—with respect to this issue and others—was exactly what their socio-cultural milieu had motivated them to look for. There is at least the suspicion that the questions they asked about church polity and structure are more indicative of this milieu than they are of a completely objective and disinterested concern for the purity of the New Testament. The prior question here is, why did Disciples attach so much value to what they thought of as "the pure and simple gospel?" The answer to the question is complex, but certainly one factor in it was the milieu out of which Disciples' concerns emerged.

We must accord considerable credence to Smith's indication that Disciples have not as yet developed an answer to the question of organization which does justice to the current principle—so widely referred to in ecumenical circles—that the church *is* mission. Yet it is apparent that we have moved a long way in the direction of understanding that such questions cannot be resolved solely on New Testament grounds, since they involve aspects for which the New Testament understanding of the church did not adequately prepare us.

IV

Did Disciples really face the decision "to be or not to be a denomination?" They did, of course. But in my opinion the issue was decided much earlier than most students of Disciples history

seem to imply. Joseph Smith correctly observes that a gradual realization that we could not have Christian unity on our preferred basis can be traced in the literature of our movement. Yet the dilemma—that to join with other “denominations” in cooperative efforts implies that Disciples are a denomination too, and it also gives “the denominations” equal status with the “true New Testament church”—cannot be resolved at the ideological and theological level if we insist upon maintaining most of the ideas on this subject which are the product of our early history. On the sociological level, the issue was resolved very early when Disciples determined on their mission to convert the world, for at this point Disciples involved themselves in the accommodation process which has tended—over and over again in Christendom—to change sects into denominations. This accommodation process has, over a period of several decades, disposed of much of Disciples “messianic complex” with respect to their mission in the world.

The third issue concerning the apostolic New Testament church tended in many ways to focus around the question of what to do with the “pious un-immersed,” and the ways of handling this question clearly influenced the context within which Disciples approached the Christian mission. If “immersion” was the shibboleth, the “cuss word” has certainly been “open membership.” Historically, Joseph Smith suggests, Disciples missionaries out in the field have taken three lines of defense against the critics of open membership. They first denied that the practice actually existed on the mission field. When this did not satisfy the critics, and seemed to involve minutiae of semantics, Disciples missionaries moved to other ground, arguing that the rigid insistence upon immersion for mission converts actually violates two quite important principles which are also a product of our heritage. These two principles were brought into the picture by noting the fact that to make immersion absolute is to write a creed, and by arguing that the local autonomy of mission congregations must be respected. Thus, said the missionaries, if you make immersion an absolute requirement you have violated our insistence upon having no creeds, and if you attempt to prevent a “native” mission congregation from admitting the pious un-immersed to full membership you violate our historic dependence upon strict autonomy.

There has been a gradual realization that unity-in-freedom and Restorationism are incompatible principles. The turning point in this development was, according to Joseph Smith’s study, the

report submitted to the 1926 International Convention by the Commission sent to the Orient to investigate the mission situation. This report implicitly rejected strict restorationism as the basis for Disciples mission efforts. Historically speaking, it is now evident that a drift away from strict restorationism can be traced in Disciples literature back through a number of decades, so that in the late 1950's those who still support restoration principles in extreme forms have drawn apart into an institutionalized sect to which A. T. DeGroot has given the name of "Church of Christ Number Two."

V

The Commission on Theology of Mission will do well to consider the import of Joseph Smith's contention that the creative era in Disciples' thought on mission really ended when the question of *how* took precedence over the question of *what*. With perceptiveness he has set forth his contention that in both soteriology and ecclesiology the creative contributions of Disciples' history have tended to disappear as they have been eroded away by certain developments in that history. What he indicates might be, I think, correctly referred to as ideological and institutional hardening of the arteries. The "Plan of Salvation" has hardened into a legalism based upon a literal translation of *baptizo*. What had been the grand event in the cosmic drama has become a theological dogma concerning the Deity of Jesus Christ. Disciples have clung stubbornly to their illusion that right preaching always is successful, and therefore have not properly prepared themselves to understand the challenge of non-Christian faiths because they have naively supposed that "the preaching of the Word" can get the job done.

Developments in ecclesiology have also left something to be desired if our goal is to find in our heritage guidance with respect to contemporary problems of mission. The question of "where is the church and what is its mission?" became the much different question "why should the church conduct and Christians support missions?" As more and more emphasis came to be placed on this query, Disciples mission(s) became a specialized activity of interested individuals and less of a motivating concern in the life of the church as such. Disciples' history, then, led them in somewhat an opposite direction from the current emphasis on the *church as mission*. With notable exceptions (e.g., McLean and Corey) Joseph Smith finds that Disciples' writings on mission have been either personal testimony and/or promotional materials. These have

their place, but they are not too much help in the job of getting back to first principles with respect to mission in the mid-twentieth century.

The promotional emphasis is also evident at another point—the adoption of “church growth” as a criterion of the effectiveness of mission. Since the “Strategy Document” makes reference to this as a guiding principle there is apparently continuity in the stress laid upon this approach. We seem to have committed ourselves, in a minimum way at least, to the proposition that successful mission must make church members. Perhaps it would be impossible for statistically-minded American Christians to entertain seriously any approach to mission which did not yield a harvest of members of their communion. This is, of course, a situation not limited to Disciples’ history with respect to mission, but shared in the mission endeavors of most American denominations.

VI

Summing up his study, and commenting upon what he calls the “emerging ecumenical era” in Disciples’ approach to mission, Joseph Smith points out that we are beginning now to ask again the fundamental theological questions. Perhaps the existence of the Commission on Theology of Mission is itself ample evidence of this. We are also, he believes, becoming abundantly aware that neither the world nor the church (meaning the other denominations) is at all interested in hearing us talk about “our plea,” or “what Disciples believe and practice.” The world and church, one may infer, treat us as exactly what they take us to be, one denomination among others, with no special claim upon Christian or any other truth.

More than this, Disciples increasingly understand that many of their peculiar points of doctrine were, after all, culture-bound. We are more willing than in the past to entertain the possibility that such items as the insistence upon local autonomy, the absolute requirement of immersion, and the practice of open communion may even be meaningless to native Christians in other societies and cultures, since they grew out of experiences not necessarily shared by these converts. Our dealing with “the young churches” are being put more on a sound anthropological, and sociological, and political basis than has ever been true in our earlier history.

With all this in mind, Joseph Smith insists, and rightly so, that Disciples have a distinctive contribution to make to “the search for the gospel and the church both among the younger

churches and in the revival of Biblical theology in the West." "They can," he says, "incarnate a spirit, demonstrate a method of approach, and interpret the *meaning* and *intent* of the insights incorporated in the traditional Disciples answers to the questions without insisting that the *form* of the answers is in itself the essence of the meaning and intent." But this involves a crucial implication, that "Disciples must *completely* abandon their adherence to Restorationism insofar as it is a futile effort to identify absolutely *any* historical form with the essence either of the Gospel or of the church."

Within the broad outlines of this approach, we can say that while Restorationism in the sense of the search for the absolutely final and fixed form of the New Testament church must be given up, Disciples had hold of a valid notion if we take Restoration to mean an attempt to preserve or to rediscover apostolic faith and practice (and I would add to this the dynamic which led people to say "those Christians, see how they love one another," and to characterize the Christians as people who were "turning the world upside down"). Immersion as a literal adherence to the letter of the New Testament is a shallow legalism, but believer's baptism by immersion as symbolizing the entrance of a person into the community of "the new being" is still relevant. Disciples' anti-creedalism and suspicion of "theology" are perhaps dangerous anachronisms, but the point that the Gospel is existential fact and not just a philosophy of life bears repeating.

In what he calls—after Kierkegaard—"Concluding Unscientific Postscript" Joseph Smith makes the observation that Disciples, emphasizing so exclusively the New Testament in their understanding of the church, neglected the principle of historical continuity, and have therefore "entertained the illusion of perpetual virginity for the church." This is, he says, an illusion, because "it is as impossible for the church, once it has been born into history, to retain its virginal purity as it is to live in perpetual infancy and still be in relevant encounter with the world."

VII

The illusion of perpetual virginity is ever with us, and in Disciples history it has taken several forms which provide the frame within which we ask some of the questions now being put concerning our current approach to mission. Some of these forms have been hinted at in our summary of Joseph Smith's historical survey of Disciples' Thought on Mission, but in what follows we shall take

a detailed look at certain of these forms, believing them to be cogent and important examples of the way in which our history conditions our present dealings with problems of mission.

First, Disciples, because of their peculiar history, are exposed to the dangers of what might be called *the golden age fallacy*. The context within which Disciples emerged was one in which the search for some golden age was a basic premise of the enterprise. The makers of our heritage apparently believed that if somehow we could get back beyond all the human creeds and post-biblical ideas and practices we could recover the apostolic church in all its purity, and this would be the church as Jesus intended it to be. Yet this approach did not reckon with the fact that, even by the time of the New Testament writings, the original sources of the Christian movement had already been overlaid with a complex tissue of "human creeds" and ideas which were different from those available to those who had known Jesus in the flesh. This much is, of course, the Disciples' version of the illusion of perpetual virginity.

In the current mission situation, one is struck—if he has the golden age fallacy in mind—with the ways in which the literature on mission seems to reflect a subtle version of that fallacy. Those committed to the mission enterprise are, we are told, puzzled. Mission is not succeeding as it ought to. Mission is facing all sorts of obstacles and roadblocks; it is even experiencing reverses in unexpected ways. The conclusion? We must have gotten off the track somewhere. So if we can only go back and find the crucial fork in the road, and then take the opposite direction we can begin to find solutions for our current problems. This approach becomes very clear when we read much of the literature on mission, in which there is constant reference to returning to biblical and apostolic sources to find the answers to our problems. There is much to be said for this trend in the sense that it is a satisfying and rewarding experience to go back and drink at the fountains of living water available to us in the accounts of the insights and understandings of the early Christians. Yet it seems important to recognize that the current mission version of a "back to the Bible" movement *may be* an escape from, rather than a solution to, both the ideological and practical problems being experienced in mission today. Disciples, as "a people of The Book," are particularly open to this possibility, and it should be kept in mind as we wrestle with our mission strategy. This does not mean that we cannot profit from the current trends in what is called Biblical Theology,

but it does suggest that we need to beware of easy verbal solutions to our problems, in this or in any other form.

VIII

Second, Disciples, again because of their peculiar history, are open to various versions of *the anti-institutional fallacy*. What might be called a suspicion of organizations and institutions has been operative in Disciples history from the very beginning. This suspicion has operated in such a way as to prevent the consideration of needs for institutionalization of procedures in pragmatic terms—i.e., in terms of what is the best way to get the job done—and has tended to place those who are attempting to solve problems of being a responsible denomination in the position of contradicting one or another Biblical idea of the apostolic church.

The fallacy of anti-institutionalism takes a more devastating form in some of the current ecumenical literature concerning mission. Lesslie Newbigin, for example, has given expression to a version of this fallacy when he says, "The Church participates in the mission only by virtue of its participation in the Holy Spirit. The mission therefore does not advance after the manner of a humanly organized campaign. . . . We have to be on our guard against thinking of the organization of Christian life and work on lines analogous to that of a human cultural or political or military operation. In the Church we are dealing with a reality of a different order."* This is, to be sure, a Christian truth which must be a part of any accurate image of the church and mission. Yet it is a truth only in the ultimate sense. To operate in terms of this non-institutional image of the church and mission will bring many confusions and practical difficulties when decisions concerning proximate issues must be made. We had better not let go of our understanding that, in many respects at least, the church is exactly like any other human social institution, and is subject to the same dynamics and necessities.

A too willing acceptance of Newbigin's "the church is different" principle may lead us to lose sight of the important point made recently by Joseph Kitagawa. "Notwithstanding the noble aims of the Christian world mission," he says, "it remains true that the church in the West, the mission board or missionary society, the mission in the field, and the native church, manifest many of the

* *One Body, One Gospel, One World* (New York, International Missionary Council, 1958), 18-19, 49-50.

features of bureaucracy, as described by sociologists The tragedy of the Christian world mission is that each of the institutions involved—the church in the West, the mission board or missionary society, the mission in the field, and the native church—defines the missionary situation from its own perspective without adequate communication among them.”** If many of the problems of mission today are at the level suggested by this approach, then it needs to be remembered that such problems cannot be solved by semantic legerdemain. We cannot deal with bureaucratic and institutional problems by entertaining the illusion that they do not exist because “the church is different.” Much more needs to be said on this point, but space does not permit any further discussion here.

IX

Third, Disciples should be aware of some difficulties which emerge potentially from what I should call *the fallacy of the obsession with Christology*. A people whose history has laid so much stress upon our being a non-creedal communion ought to look with care at the problems which may be involved in the increasing tendency to favor subscribing to particular Christological statements as expressing the meaning on which mission is to be based. It seems apparent that many Disciples who participate in the important work now going on in ecumenical circles are quite willing to accept the implications of the position taken by Wilhelm Andersen. “A new formulation of the basis of the missionary enterprise must take its start,” writes Andersen, “not from the doctrine of the Church but from the doctrine of the Person of Christ, from faith in the crucified and risen Christ.”* Andersen may, of course, be right about this, and what he is suggesting here must be taken with the utmost seriousness. Yet it appears that there are dangers involved in this approach. The shift from a doctrine of the church as a fellowship to some Christological formulation as the basis of mission ought to be examined carefully by those who come from the free church tradition.

While it is certainly true that Disciples in the past—and in the present for that matter—have been in error in believing that it is not necessary to deal with metaphysical and theological questions,

** “Divided We Stand,” *Religion in Life*, XXVII (1958), 343-344.

* *Towards A Theology of Mission* (London, Student Christian Movement Press, 1955), 41.

there is still something to be said for keeping our dealings with these questions as free and open as possible. All I am suggesting here is that going along with making acceptance of certain Christological formulae the basis for mission may do some violence to an important facet of Disciples tradition—our strong belief in freedom of opinion. It is at least a relevant and meaningful question whether Christology—high, low, or middle—should supplant a doctrine of the church as a basis for mission. The answer to the question is not, Biblical theology, existentialism, and neo-Orthodox theology notwithstanding, obvious. The matter ought to be looked at carefully. Since Disciples have placed so much emphasis upon being a Biblical people, the problems involved here are at least indirectly related to the search for perpetual virginity in the church. So we are tempted to say, if only we can get a correct Christology—that is, the official apostolic Christology—we shall have a firm basis for mission. Perhaps, but some ambiguity is certainly a factor in the situation.

X

Fourth, Disciples need to take a careful look at their tendency to go along with what might be called the fallacy of the dichotomization of the Gospel and the meeting of human needs. Again, we have a version of the myth of perpetual virginity. One has the sense that in some of the current literature on mission what is being said is that we have paid too much attention to meeting human needs in general, and not enough attention to “preaching the Gospel.” We must, we are told, concentrate on the more profound need of men, the need for “salvation,” and not divert our emphasis to developing programs of social welfare, health, and the like. In some instances, we are even told that concentration in mission upon social welfare and health is “superficial,” and we must now “get back” to the main business of mission, which is “converting people to Jesus Christ” and making church members out of them.

This is, of course, a fallacious dichotomy. Salvation is all of a piece, and to separate human need and spiritual need is a shoddy operation, both intellectually and in the pragmatic sense. Some will say that in this point we are flogging a dead horse, that nobody really performs this act of dichotomization. Perhaps this is the situation, but my reading of the literature is not reassuring on this score. The fallacious dichotomy does not become apparent so much in direct statements as in off-hand remarks, in which the impression is given that social welfare and health work which are not

clearly subordinated to the making of "Christians and church members" is somehow less desirable as a part of mission than it was a decade or so ago. The sharp reminder about this tendency in our thinking about mission indicated a few years ago by Max Warren needs to be constantly before us. Said Warren, ". . . the Christian mission must . . . recognize the *felt* needs of men, not merely their theologically defined needs, and it must meet them with the demonstration of the gospel. For Marx has reminded the world of the lesson Jesus first taught, that Word and Act must be one."*

When some version of the dichotomy we have mentioned is entertained, there is real danger that a subtle form of Western and/or denominational ethnocentrism may enter in. W. C. Lamott was right when he pointed out that "on the whole our support of the movement (mission) has been sustained by our American pride of accomplishment. Foreign missions have been *our* work, an extension abroad of *our* denomination, a task attempted by *our* missionaries."** Enlightened Western Christians are today freer from this sort of thinking than they have ever been, but if we continue to talk about our real task being to "make Christians and Church members" we may succeed in turning back the clock at this point. To be sure, making Christians and church members is a crucial matter, but only if the emphasis is not based upon some manner of separating Christianity into individual and social categories and failing to remember that our mission is to the whole man, and not to some "spiritual" portion of him.

XI

Disciples need, *because of their history*, to share enthusiastically in the contemporary emphasis which rests upon the assertion that "the church *is* mission." While Disciples did not, in their early history, place the insight that the church is mission into the context in which we find it today (they tended to draw conclusions about what the church should *not* do, rather than what the church *should* do) they nevertheless grasped the point that the church, by its very nature, is bound up with its mission in the world; i.e., "being" and "doing" are inseparable in a living organism. The church does not have mission as some extra and optional prerogative; it

* *The Christian Mission* (London Student Christian Movement Press, 1951), 27.

** *Revolution in Missions* (New York, Macmillan, 1954), 14.

has mission or it is not the church. In this regard, Newbiggin has clearly stated what has to be said. "When the separation between 'Church' and 'Mission' is maintained, the Church becomes an introverted body, concerned with its own welfare rather than with the Kingdom of God."*

* *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, 26.

A CRITIQUE OF THE IMC-WCC DOCUMENT ON THEOLOGY OF EVANGELISM*

By DONALD MCGAVRAN

THIS thorough document explores many aspects of evangelism. It is God-centered. It has width and depth and is stimulating reading.

The IMC-WCC asks us and others for suggestions for improvement, that a theology of evangelism, truer to the Bible and the Christian Faith and more representative of the whole Church may be drafted.

I set forth my contribution to this process of revision in the following three ways. First, I call attention to deficiencies which pervade the whole and come to notice again and again. Second, I summarize what needs to be done to the document. Third, I submit by way of illustration a revision of the first twelve introductory paragraphs showing how these deficiencies can be rectified. Such a revision should be made of the entire document and returned to the IMC-WCC as the contribution of the Christian Church to the conversation.

I. GENERAL DEFICIENCIES WHICH PERVADE THE WHOLE DOCUMENT

1. This document misses the passion of Christ, Paul, and the New Testament Church for the winning of men and nations. It says many true things about evangelism and theology. It divides and subdivides the subject. It describes difficulties and problems, authority and credentials. The writers of the document believe that evangelism roots in God's redemptive act, but this writing does not throb with God's passionate purpose that men believe in Christ and be found in Him. This I hold to be a *theological* weakness.

2. The document suffers from an excessively broad definition of evangelism. Every activity of the Church is evangelism. Hence nothing is keenly evangelism. This is one source of its lack of passion.

* *Theology for Evangelism*, a study document prepared by an international consultation organized by the Department of Evangelism of the World Council of Churches and offered for criticism and comment. May, 1958. Available from the Division of Studies, World Council of Churches, 17 route de Malagnou, Geneva, Switzerland.

Evangelism is, to be sure, a dimension of the entire work and life of the Church. Every Christian activity has some bearing on how men receive the Good News. But every activity does not have an evangelistic intention. The document confuses important issues to extend the word "evangelism" beyond its proper meaning. Thus the whole section entitled "The Wider Dimensions of Evangelism" (paragraphs 43-72) and some others treat of matters which have an evangelistic aspect, but as commonly practiced are not evangelism.

In a similar way, the life of Christians and churches has an unconscious witness, often used by God to the growth of His Church. But unconscious witness is not evangelism. To call it such simply obscures meaning. Evangelism, the word, must be confined to the conscious proclamation of Christ, by word and deed, with the purpose to persuade men to become His disciples and responsible members of His Church.

The truth that lies behind this confusing inclusiveness is that for evangelism to be sincere and in the long run effective, every activity of the Church and of Christians should ideally be consistent with it.

3. Theology is not an easy discipline. Yet, this statement is more involved and schematic than is necessary. For example the section entitled "What Credentials Has the Church As Evidence of the Authority It Has Received?" (paragraphs 29-39), which argues that the marks of the Church are the credentials of the evangelist, is rather labored and disproportionately long. The truth of this section can be much more briefly stated. Furthermore, I doubt if "the marks of the Church" mentioned are, in fact, credentials which "the as yet unbelieving hearer" recognizes. Many men move on a much more practical plane than this.

4. An assumption underlies many sections to the effect that theologically correct evangelism proclaims Christ but rigorously dissociates itself from any purpose to persuade. To intend "to win men to Christ" or "to persuade them to become disciples" is supposed to be cheap commercialism, an earthy concern with "mere numbers" and "results," or an attempt to usurp the prerogative of the Holy Spirit Who alone converts. This assumption, we believe, is morally and theologically unsound and out of harmony with biblical Christianity.

It is morally unsound because every evangelist invariably proclaims Christ to the end that men may believe. Through whatever

circumlocution he may explain it (that "the Holy Spirit converts," that "men are, to be sure, persuaded, but he had nothing to do with it," etc., etc.) his purpose *is* to persuade. It is dishonest for him to disclaim it.

It is theologically unsound because Christ Himself commands men to reap ripened fields and to pray the Lord for more and more reapers. Love constrains men to claim the Gospel, not as an exercise in detachment, but that sinners may repent, be baptized, and added to the Lord. The Christian, seeking maybe a new depth of humility, who says "I merely tell about God's mighty Act in Christ and have no responsibility as to whether men actually believe or not—that is the concern of God or the Holy Spirit. I do not have to worry about that" has somehow missed Christ's realism and love entirely. Such a man sounds more like Khrishna talking to Arjun in the Gita. The shepherd does not go out to search (to carry through a form). He goes out to search *for lost sheep*. He seeks results. If he does not find sheep, his search is not successful.

According to biblical theology, God is the Evangelist, *but so is man* (Gal. 4:14, 1:16, Romans 10:14, and the entire record). By whatever system the theology of evangelism is stated (Augustinian, Thomistic, Calvinistic, Arminian, Barthian, et al) that proclamation of Christ which is evangelism will be done *by men with the intent that men may believe and be saved*.

To be sure, man is helpless in himself for salvation and cannot be saved except by the grace of God from start to finish. No man can give another the new birth or eternal life. But men, like Andrew, can bring their brothers to Christ and *are responsible for doing so*. It neither glorifies God nor is pleasing to Him for a Christian to say "I merely tell you about Christ and really do not care whether you accept Him or not." Christians do care. They should actively associate themselves with the purpose to persuade. That is what they are commanded to do. Evangelism is theologically correct when it proclaims Christ with an active purpose that men be persuaded to become His Disciples.

Another reason for trying to keep evangelism free of all desire for concrete effectiveness is "unripe" irresponsive populations. We are commanded to "go into all the world" and proclaim the Gospel "to every creature." If we define evangelism in terms of purposefully seeking lost sheep, will the world mission not withdraw from areas where it brings none home on its shoulders!

Our theology of evangelism should safeguard this point.

Christ died for the ungodly and we are responsible for telling them about it even if they will not hear. But to safeguard this point by insisting that the search alone is the thing and we are *never responsible for finding lost sheep* is using a sledge hammer to crack an egg. It is much truer to the New Testament to say that some men and peoples are so irresponsible and rebellious that evangelism, which is real in the sight of God (He who knows the heart knows that the evangelists concerned really purpose to persuade men of Christ), may win none to Christ.

This will leave us free to say what desperately needs being said—that any evangelism which comes empty handed out of ripened fields (most populations in the West and a growing number of responsive areas all round the world) should examine itself in the light of the Master's command to reap, His promise of the Holy Spirit to reapers, and the hand of God in whitening the crop. Just as there is no teaching unless there is learning, so in spiritually hungry populations there is no evangelism unless men do in fact receive the Bread of Life. Churchmen in the many repening and responsive populations of today should beware of self-deception in substituting words for sheaves. This cannot be in accordance with the holy will of Him Who gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes on Him should find everlasting life.

On this point we note that the Asmara Conference recently completed, which dealt with the evangelization of Moslems, said "Although the response is not altogether our responsibility, yet in witnessing we must concern ourselves with what people are to do about Christ. If we preach without expecting them to respond to Christ we fail in our task." If this is true of the irresponsible Moslem world, how much more can be said of the responsive fields of the West and elsewhere!

5. Negative remarks in the document scorning proclamation and evangelism creep in now and then. They should be removed. Take paragraph 57.¹ It says that the Christian will commend the

¹ For the individual Christian the normative service will most often be expressed through his secular calling: in daily work, in professional associations, and in community living. Through these day to day encounters the Gospel has its widest and closest contact with the world, and they should be much more than the occasions for pious declamations. Indeed, these may, in the context of the world's work, do more harm than good. The contacts which daily life provide, should rather be the means of sharing this world's burdens, and a continuing expression of Christian solidarity with the rest of mankind. The Church must instruct and sustain its members in this encounter with the

gospel through his work-a-day encounters with the world "which should be much more than the occasion for pious declamations which may do more harm than good." Why 'pious declamations'? How much better to say without scorn "which should consistently support what the Christian proclaims." A theology of evangelism should not call for proclamation of Christ and then ridicule efforts which often are awkward, hesitant, or incomplete.

Take paragraph 71.² "The world may see no great evangelizing relevance in the fact that a pious remnant goes to church." Why stigmatize churchgoers? How much better to say, "in the fact that faithful Christians regularly go to church to worship God." All such belittling phrases should be removed.

6. In paragraphs 51-65 lie the sections on Christian action, service, daily living, koinonia, and unity. Have these sections been written by men more deeply concerned with these activities than with evangelism? Let us be clear. All these activities are good, but they are not evangelism and have been disproportionately stressed in a theology of evangelism.

For example, in the sections on worship (paragraphs 66-72), are sentences like this: "A penitent church will have to grant that its formalized worship has often been a substitute for evangelism." This, of course, is quite true. It is equally true that the service of men, daily life, social justice, Christian action, unity and diakonia have often become substitutes for proclaiming the Gospel with the expectation that men will become disciples of Christ—which also a penitent Church will have to grant! Yet, this document assumes that each of these good activities is the best kind of evangelism. Why so eloquent in regard to the dangers of worship and proclamation and so silent in regard to the dangers of these other Christian activities?

7. Most paragraphs are quite clear that belief in Christ is essential to salvation, but some statements seem to admit salvation through other means. For example, see the last sentence in para-

world and encourage new and pioneering experiments by the laity in witnessing to Christ through their secular calling.

² Or again, the world may see no great evangelizing relevance, in the lands of secularized Christendom at least, in the fact that a pious remnant goes to church on a Sunday morning. Yet that simple walking toward a sanctuary can, in an environment of alien faiths or of disaffection to Christianity, be a witness leading to a martyrdom of ridicule as hard to bear as physical suffering. A public baptism or the public taking of vows of marriage may, on many occasions, similarly be a light shining before men.

graph 29. It should read (added portion italicized) "The Church itself is witness that, *within the community of those who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour*, the Spirit has brought and is bringing men from death to life."

The effort to find a common ground or means of communication between believers and unbelievers leads to inclusive language which is ambiguous at this point. Note also the use of the word "religion" (as "the return to religion") when what is meant is Christian faith or the Christian religion. This is always misleading. It assumes, contrary to the entire Bible, that religion is always a good; and it equates Christianity with any other religion.

8. In paragraph 89³ and elsewhere the point is made that Christian life should be in harmony with the message it proclaims. With that all must agree. Yet, if to evangelize is merely to live in conformity with the Gospel, then it is easy for good Christian people to settle back so sensitive about "imposing their will on others in regard to Christ" that they become witnesses to other's causes. They are known as kindly neighbors not as kindly Christians. They advocate a higher standard of living—about that they are quite insistent. They do not advocate Christ—about Him they are decently reticent. Churches made up of people like this die. Paragraph 89 should be re-written to show that life in conformity with the Gospel is evangelism only when infused by a passionate purpose that men be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ.

9. Paragraphs 95-100 treat of the attitudes of the evangelist toward the non-believer. They tell, from nearly every angle, what the evangelist should *not* do. If there are to be five such negative paragraphs, there should be twenty five positive ones. When the appendix is ruptured, the physician must, to be sure, not insult the patient nor act like a demi-god. These avail little however if he does not successfully complete the operation. A dead patient, who has not been insulted, is not the *desideratum*. An unconverted sinner, whose personality has not been violated, is not the goal.

The attitudes we hold toward the non-Christian must be that of our Lord, Who called men fearlessly to discipleship, came to seek those who walked the highways and by-ways looking for men,

³ "But to evangelize is more than to proclaim the Gospel by word and to be sustained by it. *It is to live in conformity with it.* The Church and its members are servants of those to whom they proclaim the Gospel. The evangelistic ministry corporate as well as individual, expresses itself by its deeds and inner life as well as by its words."

and gave His life a ransom for many. It must also be that of Paul who, even while earning his living by tent-making in Corinth, is daily "beseeching" men to be reconciled to God, and is daily in the synagogue "arguing" and persuading men "that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 18:4, 5). He also wishes himself accursed if only more and more of his brethren after the flesh could be saved.

These six paragraphs have an academic flavor. Luther, Wesley, or Paul could not have been their author. They fail to see that right doctrine which does not gird men for action is not right doctrine at all. They seem to believe that it is theologically necessary for an evangelist not to appear or be aggressive. They do not overflow with that passion for men's salvation which should fill a theology of mission and evangelism.

10. Almost entirely lacking is any recognition of the hand of God in creating the vast responsiveness which marks our days. God works in history. His acts are seen in history. The theological significance of winnable multitudes is nowhere recognized, to say nothing of pointed to as of great importance. It is as if someone standing in the Reformation spent his time wondering whether Luther and Calvin and Zwingli were theologically correct and not spotting that *God* was mightily stirring the members of His Household. Whether the return to the Christian faith (I will not say 'religion' for that includes Voodoo and Vedanta) in America is adequately shepherded and cultivated by the churches or not, it unquestionably is His work, Who led the miserable slaves out of bondage. God is acting in our time.

11. Similarly the pitifully small response of the Church to the enormous spiritual hunger of animistic Africa, for example, where a hundred million people are in the process of leaving animism for some other faith—this pitiful response has *meaning to God*. He will say, "I was hungry and you gave me no food." Evangelism is carried out today in a world hungering for the Bread of Life. The Church acts in the face of thirsty millions begging for that Water which springs up to eternal life. Any theology of evangelism must say something as to the adequacy of the Church's efforts in the face of unprecedented responsiveness. Is God pleased with the size of the efforts of His Household to proclaim the Gospel?

12. We wonder whether the document has been written out of a particularly bleak background. The Church seems to be halted. Society faces an inner collapse. The cathedral of norms and ideas,

standards and hopes has disintegrated from within. This is one diagnosis of western society and is, no doubt, true to some extent. In Part III, where we give an example of the revision the document needs, we include this somber emphasis. We all need it.

But it is not the whole truth. We also live in a time when God is granting His churches notable victories—in social justice, recapturing the mind of Christ, extending the Church, fighting the battle for brotherhood, meeting the challenges of a new era, keeping the doors to Christian freedom open, baptizing multitudes in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and bringing about a friendly spirit of unity among the Churches. Christ is leading us forward in triumph and this fragrance of life to life pervades many areas of life today. Many Macedonias beckon and are entered. God lives and is in charge of His world. The Kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord, no matter how dark it may look in some portions of the harvest field.

This too should mark a theology of mission and evangelism. So in our revisions we have inserted again and again a note of hope. We all need it.

II. WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO THE DOCUMENT

The revision should, we believe, use the present framework as far as possible, and proceed along the following lines.

1. The structure of the document can be improved. It now proceeds on one dead level, paragraph after paragraph. The introductory section should set forth the major argument (Our revision, Part III, does not attempt to do this. It cannot be done till the whole argument is before us).

The body should take up the main divisions of the theology, each carefully proportioned. Major emphases should appear major both by their position and by their length. Minor emphases, if kept at all, should be reduced in length. Ideas should march more clearly than they do.

Possibly at the end—or the beginning—is needed a call in the name of God to evangelize, to go forward in a day of great hope, to go “out into the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that God’s house may be filled.”

2. Throughout should be added the compulsion to witness which is such an integral part of the record. Refugee Christians went everywhere “preaching the word.” Men beaten and jailed go right back to persuading men to become disciples. When commanded to desist they say boldly, “We must obey God rather than

men." In Antioch "a great number" turns to the Lord. Barnabas arrives and a further "large company" is added to the Lord. Then Barnabas hurries off to Tarsus to look for Saul so that Antioch might yield still more sheaves. "Necessity is laid upon me. Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel" is an essential ingredient in a theology of evangelism and mission.

3. Similarly the deep desire of God that men through belief in Christ come to salvation needs repeated expression. We suppose that the writers of the present document have assumed this, thinking it unnecessary to stress it, but, not to mention it repeatedly conveys the wrong meaning. The document in all its parts should throb with Christ's never ending search for lost sheep. It must constantly remind its readers that He commands us to pray for laborers that white fields may be reaped.

4. While cordially recognizing the need for social justice, Christian unity, and the service of mankind, the document should say that these are not substitutes for evangelism. Churches stressing only these have remained barren in the midst of enormous numbers of men and women who would see Jesus. Edit to make the whole document distinguished between evangelism and other good activities.

5. Eliminate all phrases and sentences which belittle proclamation. Present proclamation as good in any form,—needing to be both increased and deepened.

6. Replace words and phrases which permit one to think that all religions lead to God. The document should everywhere be unequivocal that outside of conscious acceptance of Christ, "no one (be he materialist, Marxist, son of Christians, Buddhist, or Moslem) comes to the Father."

7. Maintain that while correct life and action, correct proclamation and witness and correct theology of evangelism are good, they are not evangelism. That is so proclaiming Christ that men *are* persuaded to become His disciples. "Sound evangelism" which neither increases churches nor Christians is an opiate of Christian theorists. Edit to say this.

8. Christian living is good; but trusting that it will, without conscious intent on our part, commend or proclaim the Gospel, is bad. Mere Christian living is not evangelism and must not be confused with it. Edit to make the pertinent paragraphs say this.

9. Compress the negative paragraphs 95-100 into one and add four positive paragraphs pointing out that four marks of the

biblical attitude toward the non-Christian are:

passion to bring men to Christian commitment;
intentness on the end that Christ be known and obeyed;
sacrifice of self that others may find Christ and live; and
belief that 'faith in Christ' makes an eternal difference,
that it is the pearl of great price for which a man
should sell all.

III. A REVISION OF THE FIRST SECTION OF THE DOCUMENT

This is presented as an example of the sort of thing which should be done for the whole. Altered or added words are in CAPS. The original is in lower case.

WHEN GOD SPEAKS HE ALSO ACTS: SOME BASIC CONSIDERATIONS.

1. GOD'S message is Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word made flesh, He has acted and is acting for the redemption of man and the whole of creation. This saving action is carried on through the ministry of reconciliation given to the Church in which Jesus Christ acts as the Living Lord through the Holy Spirit. THIS SAVING ACTION OPERATES IN EVERY ASPECT OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE. THAT SPECIFIC ACTIVITY HOWEVER WHICH PROCLAIMS CHRIST THROUGH WORD AND DEED WITH THE OBEDIENT PURPOSE THAT MEN BE PERSUADED TO BECOME HIS DISCIPLES AND RESPONSIBLE MEMBERS OF HIS CHURCH, WE CALL EVANGELISM.

2. As we look at what the Church has actually done in inviting men of all nations to partake of the Living Bread, we see a great gap between the biblical picture of the drama of salvation as it is known in Jesus Christ and its presentation by the Church in history. For that reason the Church must be humble about what it has done in evangelism and must be ready to test its witness according to the demands of the Word.

3. As one looks at the evangelistic work of the Church today, he sees that there are many serious questions to be raised and answered. For example, note the following two deficiencies. In many places there is proclaimed an offer of personal salvation which leaves out of account the fulness and power of the Gospel. A frustrating gap exists between BIBLICAL redemption and the message of individual salvation which is proclaimed. IN OTHER PLACES THERE IS SUCH AN EMPHASIS ON WORSHIP,

ORGANIZATION, CHRISTIANIZING THE SOCIAL ORDER, ACHIEVING UNITY AMONG THE CHURCHES, EDUCATING CHRISTIAN CHILDREN, OR SERVING THE PHYSICAL NEEDS OF MEN (ALL GOOD DEEDS) THAT MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHURCHES REMAINS STATIONARY OR EVEN DECLINES IN THE MIDST OF SPIRITUALLY HUNGRY AND RESPONSIVE POPULATIONS. NEITHER DEFICIENCY IS PLEASING TO GOD.

4. In some parts of the WORLD today the Church is successful in its evangelistic work as measured by influx of members and a degree of return to CHRISTIAN FAITH. WHILE THANKING GOD FOR ANY INCREASE OF GENUINE CHRISTIANS AND ANY MANIFESTATION OF HIS GRACE, we point out that such ADVANCE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF COMPLETE EFFECTIVENESS OR ADEQUATE ACHIEVEMENT, in the evangelistic work of the Church. Any return to the CHRISTIAN FAITH means that God is giving ALL BRANCHES OF HIS CHURCH a new opportunity to DISCIPLE MEN AND NATIONS. ANY INFLUX OF MEMBERS INTO ANY BRANCH OF THE CHURCH CHIDES BRANCHES STANDING OUTSIDE THE HARVEST FIELDS CRITICIZING THE MODE OF REAPING.

5. In other parts of the WORLD today the work of the Church seems to be on an ebbing tide. Evangelists; i.e., ALL MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD, have two LESSONS to learn under these circumstances.

a) TO LABOR confidently on through the night, even if it seems long. Faithfulness is required in the midst of defeat.

b) TO FIND WAYS OF PROCLAMATION WHICH EVEN ON AN EBBING TIDE BRING MEN TO CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT. MANY AN EBBING TIDE HAS BEEN REVERSED BY A SPECIALLY DEVOTED PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL (ACTS 8:4ff). NOTHING IS MORE DEADLY THAN RESOLUTE ADHERENCE TO POLITY, ECCLESIOLOGY, THEOLOGY, AND METHODOLOGY OF EVANGELISM WHICH THEORETICALLY OUGHT TO PROCLAIM CHRIST, ADD PERSONS TO THE LORD, AND FIND LOST SHEEP, BUT ACTUALLY DO NOT.

6. FAITHFULNESS AND PASSION TO MULTIPLY BELIEVERS are also required in the midst of bewilderment. That is the situation in some countries and some populations in Asia and Africa. In those sections, non-Christian religions assert their

adequacy and point to their own achievements as a demonstration of it. The Gospel seems powerless in the face of such self-confidence, even though Christians know that such self-confidence is itself a sign of estrangement from God.

7. IN OTHER COUNTRIES AND SECTIONS OF COUNTRIES VAST RESPONSIVENESS OBTAINS. INDIVIDUALS AND PEOPLES ARE SEEKING CHRIST IN UNPRECEDENTED FASHION. TO THIS RESPONSIVENESS THE CHURCHES DO NOT ADEQUATELY RESPOND. GREATLY INCREASED ATTENTION TO POPULATIONS WHICH RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL IS URGENTLY NEEDED, BECAUSE RESPONSIVENESS IS CAUSED BY GOD AND HAS ENORMOUS THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS.

AS FORETOLD BY AMOS, MEN IN MANY POPULATIONS HAVE BECOME CONSCIOUS OF THE FAMINE OF THE WORD OF GOD AND ARE RUNNING TO AND FRO THROUGHOUT THE LAND SEEKING BREAD AND NOT FINDING IT. THEY ARE THOSE CONCERNING WHOM OUR LORD SAID "I WAS HUNGRY AND YOU GAVE ME NO FOOD."

8. A theology of evangelism must deal with all these ASPECTS OF THE SITUATION, if it is to help the churches be obedient today to their evangelistic task. IN DEALING WITH THEM IT MUST BEAR IN MIND BOTH the social and political realities of the world into which the Gospel is taken AND THE INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER OF DECISION. Obedience must be the true nature of the Gospel. IT MUST BEAR IN MIND THE SURRENDER OF THE INDIVIDUAL SOUL TO GOD-IN-CHRIST AND THE WAY IN WHICH GROUPS OF PERSONS AND INDEED WHOLE PEOPLES BECOME CHRISTIAN. Christ as the Lord of the world, deals with the human situation in every historical moment and in every structure of society. Therefore it is the task of the evangelist to follow the Master's steps and find the dimensions in which the Gospel can be made incarnate in THE LIVES OF MEN AND WOMEN, PEOPLES AND NATIONS IN TODAY'S WORLD.

9. Our world is in a period of great social and technological change. This change raises two points of significance for Christian evangelism. First, it requires the Church to work out the implications of the Gospel for people who live in technical societies. The Church must state AT LEAST A PART OF ITS MESSAGE

in terms which are relevant to the problems of men in technical societies. Second, the Church must recognize the danger of STATING ITS MESSAGE SO COMPLETELY IN THESE TERMS that it identifies itself with certain classes and groups in society.

10. The development of technical society means a change in the spirit of man as well as in the structure of society. Anxiety about the future, inability to make decisions because of a sense of being dominated by mass society, too great a confidence in his own technical achievements, loneliness in the midst of impersonal collectivism, are some of the psychological and spiritual attributes of THOSE uprooted, regimented, instrumentalized, and alienated men of our times WHO FORM SUCH A LARGE PROPORTION OF MANY URBAN POPULATIONS AND AN INCREASING THOUGH AS YET SMALL PART OF THE RURAL POPULATIONS. SUCH MEN MUST BE WON TO CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT AND INTEGRATED INTO CONGREGATIONS DESIGNED FOR A TECHNICAL SOCIETY.

11. The reactions of the Church to modern, technical, mass-minded man and society show uncertainty and confusion. Many CHRISTIANS still do not realize that they have lost ground with particular social groups, because of an INADEQUATE conception of the problems of modern man, or because they are too closely associated with certain classes of society, or because THEY THINK THAT MODERN MAN MUST SEEK THE CHURCH AND FAIL TO REALIZE THAT THE CHURCH MUST SEEK HIM WITH THE PASSION OF THE SAVIOUR. Too often to the man in need, the Church appears as a body which his KIND OF MEN do not understand or need, or as an institution concerned with problems in which HIS KIND OF SOCIETY is not interested. Culturally and socially the Church seems to many IN CERTAIN STRATA OF SOCIETY to be an anachronism or an irrelevant middle class institution. This undermines its spiritual potency. The Church must learn how to communicate its message to SUCH SECTIONS OF SOCIETY AS DO NOT RESPOND TO THE MESSAGE AS HISTORICALLY PROCLAIMED. MUCH CAN BE LEARNED HERE FROM THE CHURCHES OF THE WEST OFTEN SCORNFULLY CALLED SECTS. The new environment requires radical re-adaptation of methods to meet the challenge of the changing world and the technological revolution which now engulfs so large a part of its peoples.

12. UNNUMBERED MULTITUDES OF MEN AND WOMEN ALSO ARE NOT YET A PART OF TECHNICAL SOCIETY, BUT LIVE INDIVIDUAL LIVES. NO AGE IN HISTORY HAS PRESENTED MAN WITH MORE CHOICES THAN DOES OURS. SPECIFICALLY IS THIS TRUE OF MODERN FARMERS, PROFESSIONAL MEN, THE RETIRED, VACATIONERS, STUDENTS, AND MANY OTHERS OF THE WEST. TO THEM MUST BE ADDED SCORES OF MILLIONS IN AFRICA, ASIA, AND LATIN AMERICA WHO, SO FAR FROM LIVING IN TECHNICAL SOCIETY, LIVE RATHER IN A MEDIEVAL OR PRE-MEDIEVAL SOCIETY. A PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL SUCH AS WILL WIN THESE MULTITUDES TO DISCIPLESHIP IS A MATTER OF HIGH PRIORITY IN EVANGELISM TODAY.

13. MULTITUDES TODAY ARE OUT OF CHRIST OR NEGLECT HIM BECAUSE IN TECHNICAL SOCIETY CHRIST, AS CURRENTLY PRESENTED, SEEMS IRRELEVANT. BUT OTHER MULTITUDES ARE OUT OF CHRIST BECAUSE THEY LOVE THIS WORLD, HAVE BEEN BY-PASSED BY THE CHURCHES, HAVE NEVER BEEN PERSUADED TO BECOME DISCIPLES, OR HAVE DELIBERATELY CHOSEN TO LIVE IN THE WORLD ACCORDING TO THE DICTATES OF THEIR OWN HEARTS. THESE ALSO ARE MEN FOR WHOM CHRIST DIED AND ANY THEOLOGY OF EVANGELISM MUST SPEAK TO THEIR REDEMPTION.

14. PERSUASIVE PROCLAMATION — A PROCLAMATION WHICH INTENDS THAT MEN BE ADDED TO THE CHURCH—IS URGENT. THIS MEANS NOT THAT WE “SHOULD BEGIN TO THINK ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE GOSPEL FOR A TIME OF SOCIAL UPHEAVAL AND RENEWAL,” FOR THAT IS SPECULATION NOT EVANGELISM. TO BECOME EVANGELISM IT MUST PROCLAIM THE ETERNAL GOOD NEWS OF CHRIST IN SUCH WAYS THAT INDIFFERENT, PROUD, REBELLIOUS MAN IS CONVERTED. THE GOAL IS CLEAR, NAMELY THAT BOTH MODERN MASS MAN AND INDIVIDUAL MAN, BOTH WESTERN MAN AND EASTERN MAN, BOTH THE RULING CLASSES AND THE ILLITERATE EXPOITED MASSES, BOTH URBAN MAN AND RURAL MAN BE “ADDED TO THE LORD” IN “THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.”

15. THEOLOGICALLY SPEAKING, EVANGELISM IS NEITHER 'RIGHT DOCTRINE WHETHER ANYONE IS PERSUADED OR NOT' NOR 'NEW METHODS WHETHER ANYONE BECOMES A DISCIPLE OR NOT.' NOR IS IT DISINTERESTED DETACHED WITNESS TO JESUS CHRIST WHICH, SHELTERING BEHIND THE DOCTRINE THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT CONVERTS (AS HE TRULY DOES), HAS NO INTENTION OF PERSUADING MEN TO BECOME DISCIPLES OF CHRIST. THEOLOGICALLY SPEAKING, EVANGELISM IS THAT WHICH INTENDS BY ITS DEEDS AND BY ITS WITNESS, GUIDED AT THIS STAGE ALSO BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, THAT MEN SHOULD COME INTO HUMBLE OBEDIENT DISCIPLESHIP TO JESUS CHRIST. THE SAVIOUR SEEKS FOR MEN AND EVANGELISM OCCURS WHEN MEN WHOLLY SINK THEIR WILLS INTO HIS, ARE POSSESSED BY HIM, AND UNDER HIS DIRECTION AND 'FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT' PURPOSEFULLY SEEK FOR MEN ALSO. THIS IS BIBLICAL EVANGELISM.

16. GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON, AND GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE GREAT EVANGELIST. DISCIPLES OF CHRIST ARE HIS SERVANTS, HIS MESSENGERS, HIS OBEDIENT CHILDREN. IN THE GREAT TASK OF SEEKING AND SAVING THOSE WHO ARE LOST, GOD HOLDS US RESPONSIBLE NOT ONLY FOR EVANGELISTIC INTENTIONS BUT FOR EFFICIENT EFFORTS TO CARRY THEM OUT. THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS AND OTHERS REQUIRE EFFICIENT CONDUCT OF THE LORD'S BUSINESS. THE PARABLE OF THE BANQUET (LUKE 14) AND OTHERS TEACH THAT MERE INVITATION IS INADEQUATE. GOOD INTENTIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH. GOD WANTS HIS BANQUET HALL FILLED. MULTITUDES MATTER TO HIM. EVERY LOST SON IS PRECIOUS IN HIS SIGHT. HE IS OUR FATHER AND THOSE WHOM HE COMMANDS US TO DISCIPLE ARE HIS EXCEEDINGLY PRECIOUS CHILDREN. "I GAVE MY ONLY SON FOR THEIR SALVATION," HE SAYS. "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?"

A THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE STRATEGY OF WORLD MISSION OF THE DIVISION OF WORLD MISSION OF THE UNITED CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY SOCIETY

By WILLIAM R. BAIRD, JR.

THE theological analysis of a document of this sort* is a difficult undertaking. It is attempted here only at the request of the Division of World Mission and the Council on Christian Unity, but even then with a sense of fear and trembling. The framers of the document were probably for the most part not theologians and their purpose was not to compose a treatise of theological excellence. Theirs was a practical task—to rethink and formulate the basic possibilities of the missionary enterprise; theirs was an urgency which could wait no studied response of ‘experts.’ The critics are aware, too, that the document is the product of committee procedure, and this sort of endeavor rarely produces absolute clarity and consistency. Moreover, the process has occupied many hours of devoted service which is deserving only of the highest praise.

Criticism of the strategy document then, is undertaken with humility. Those who composed this paper are not theologians, but only students of theology. Unfortunately they were unable to enlist more overt participation on the part of their fellow-committeemen who were prevented from writing sections of this report due too busy schedules and prior commitments. It is also regrettable that this paper was not completed in time to circulate to the other members and consultants of the sub-committee in order to receive and incorporate their reactions. This was due mainly to the procrastination of the chairman. The paper, then, was actually written by two members of the committee; the first part by William Baird and the second by William Barr. These men represent different theological presuppositions and biases, but their attempt has been to evaluate the strategy document in the light of the current theological discussion.

There was the temptation at the outset to offer some general criticism of the document. It seems too long for its purposes, it

* *Strategy of World Mission, Basic Policy of the Division of World Mission, United Christian Missionary Society, 222 South Downey Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana. Second Issue, January, 1959. Full text of the Strategy is included in this issue of the Ecumenical Studies Series.*

is often repetitious, its style is not entirely consistent, its organization is not always clear. These matters have been ignored; the concern has been with the theological implications of the strategy document. Many, no doubt, will not agree with the theology or theologies which are reflected in the critique; this is as it should be. The paper will perform its task if it merely arouses the interest of others to participate in the debate so that in the process the document will be clarified and strengthened. Some will object that the critics have quibbled about fine points or about matters so obscure as to be unimportant. There no doubt will be truth in such objections, but the objectors should be reminded that the mission of the church is no simple matter and the attempt to understand it in clarity and profundity should not be shirked through intellectual sloth. If such administrative details as 'who will carry what portfolio where' are matters of precise attention, then how can we avoid precision and depth in considering the nature of the mission of the church and the character of the world to which that mission extends.

I THE BASIS AND NATURE OF THE WORLD MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Any adequate strategy of world missions must be aware of the ground on which it stands and the nature of its task. What is the basis and authority for missionary activity? What is the relationship of the missionary enterprise to the church? What is the nature of the gospel which the church is called to proclaim? What is the particular responsibility of a missionary organization representing the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)?

A. THE BASIS OF MISSION.

The strategy document assumes certain presuppositions as to the foundation of the missionary enterprise. For one thing, the document has been produced by the Division of World Mission of the United Christian Missionary Society whose sole purpose for existence is "That the world may more fully come to know Christ, the Son of God; that all men everywhere may increasingly appropriate for themselves his way of life; that a world of Christian brotherhood may be realized, and that the unity of God's people may be achieved . . ." (p. 3). The document, therefore, quotes this statement from the Society's Code of Regulations and adopts it as the basis for a responsible world mission. Thus the assumed authority for world mission is the commission of the church acting through a representative organization—an authority whose valid-

ity has been attested existentially by decades of devoted participation in the world-wide work of God.

On a still deeper level the document asserts that the world mission is grounded in the redemptive purposes of God. "Consideration of any strategy of Christian thought and program must begin with the purpose of God through Christ to redeem the world" (p. 3). This sound theological statement is buttressed biblically by the appropriate citation of John 3:16, and is repeated in slightly different words on p. 8, where the document urges "New commitment on the part of the Disciples of Christ to the purpose of God through Christ to redeem the world through the establishing of the church."

Although it is not clearly stated, the document validly implies that the redemptive purposes of God are revealed in Christ, particularly in the cross. "All men are a part of God's creation and all are included in the great purpose effected on Calvary" (p. 4). The term 'Calvary,' of course, is an unfortunate one, since it is a mere Latinization of the Aramaic *Golgotha* and draws attention to the place of crucifixion rather than to the crucified Christ, the power and wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:24). But that the event of redemption is primarily the act of God is suggested by the statement that "The price of the redeeming gospel of Christ is the cross" (p. 4). It is here that God reveals his will to man "concerning the issues confronting him in this critical time" (p. 6). "Our responsibility as Christians is to seek the answers that are given by God, not by man. The answers of God are given through the Cross" (p. 6). In this cross is seen the 'love of Christ' which more than anything else constitutes the real power of the missionary (p. 11).

The strategy document also declares that the basis and authority of world mission is grounded in Scripture. The use of John 3:16 to support the missionary purpose has already been noted, but the intention "to root our strategy in the teachings of the New Testament" is made explicit on p. 5. Consequently biblical quotations are used to introduce major sections throughout the document. The kind of church polity which the proposed strategy advocates is thought to be based on the Bible. Thus congregational autonomy, which is given perhaps an inordinate place in the document, is said to rest on "the fundamental New Testament principle of congregational form of church government" (p. 11). This concern for an "approach to Christianity based upon a simple

biblical presentation in teaching the doctrines" (p. 16) ought to be retained within any merger entertained by the younger churches. And, it may be assumed, the six freedoms which the Disciples seek to express (pp. 18 f.) could be documented with citations of chapter and verse. Of particular importance for the whole idea of mission and evangelism is the view that the Bible is to be used as a basis for church membership (p. 16).

Great emphasis is placed in the strategy document on the current world situation as a motivating force for world mission. It is interesting that of all the material presented by the Willingen meeting of the International Missionary Council much of which was theological in nature, the writers of the strategy of world missions decided to quote a section of the report which grounds the mission of the church in the crises of the time (p. 6). Since the church faces a world where non-Christian faiths are winning sweeping victories, it is implied that Christianity ought to get busy with the task of evangelizing the world. True enough, the answers which the Christian should offer to the world are said to be God-given, but the questions which move us to the proclamation of truth are raised by man "seeking answers to his questions concerning the issues confronting him in this critical time" (p. 6). We live in a "world of revolution" where the "rising tide of nationalism, communism, or racial crises" demand a missionary program of sufficient mobility (p. 8). "The Christian message should be related to the basic needs of people through the church and mission by identifying the message with the life of the people among whom it has been established" (p. 9).

Similar to this concern for the current situation is the document's assertion that pragmatic considerations are primary missionary motives. Thus the United Christian Missionary Society "prefers to participate in cooperative enterprises in every instance where the cooperative project may do the more effective job" (p. 14), and mergers on the field may be of practical value where "The Christian community is small, an isolated oasis in the desert of paganism of ancient religious cultures or of the newer faiths of communism or nationalism" (p. 14). Indeed, it is apparent that pragmatic and utilitarian concerns are foremost in the minds of the authors when in their 'last word' (p. 27) they insist that the real test of the proposed strategy is whether or not it will work.

Much of this material on the basis of the mission is of high theological merit. The declaration that the missionary task is

grounded in the redemptive purposes of God revealed in Christ and witnessed by the Scriptures would be applauded by most contemporary theologians. Many, however, might find the emphasis on the current situation and on pragmatic concerns to be somewhat excessive. The mission of the church is derived primarily from the commission of God, and questions of the relative success of the venture or the effectiveness of the gospel in meeting the needs of the times are always secondary and sometimes unimportant. Paul went out to the ends of the earth because he was under a divine imperative. "For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (I Cor. 9:16).

This is not to say that the world situation is of no importance as a motive for the world mission of the church. Paul, no doubt, was in part moved to his tremendous task by the sorry plight of his contemporaries, since all had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). So great was his concern for the Jews that he could say, "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race" (Rom. 9:3). Moreover, the Apostle's short stay in Athens was probably determined to some degree by the meagerness of the response which his message engendered there. Theologians of the neo-Orthodox bent need to be reminded now and then that if history is the realm where God works, as they so emphatically assert, then the world situation may provide a somewhat veiled revelation of the redemptive activity of the Almighty. This revelation, of course, will be perceived only by the man of faith who has already seen the revelation of the whole drama of salvation in the event of Jesus Christ. The redemptive purpose of God is the basis of the world mission of the church, and the situation of the world provides a motive for mission only as it reflects the divine activity. Therefore, the strategy document errs in its overemphasis on pragmatic and utilitarian concerns and its failure adequately to ground demands of the current situation in the historical revelation of the history of salvation. Throughout the document the reader is given the impression that the mission is entirely something that we do, and this impression is confirmed by the small place which is given to the missionary function of the Holy Spirit (cf. p. 24). We need to be reminded by D. T. Niles that, "Evangelism is not something we do, it is something God does."¹

¹ D. T. Niles, *That They May Have Life* (New York: Harper, 1951), p. 53.

Similarly, some theologians will doubtless be distressed by the citation from the United Society's Code of Regulations which is quoted by the document on p. 3. Precisely what the Code means in declaring that the purpose of the Society is "that the world may more fully come to know Christ, the Son of God" is not made clear. But when it goes on to say "that all men everywhere may increasingly appropriate for themselves his way of life; that a world of Christian brotherhood may be realized" the reader is given the impression that the purpose of the mission is primarily to instruct mankind in the ethical teachings of Jesus. This is indeed a noble purpose, but it reflects doctrinal sentiments which are not received with great enthusiasm within the current theological discussion. Of course, it is not to be expected that the strategy document should revise the Code of Regulations, but perhaps the suggestion that the materials of the Society be re-studied in the light of more vital and valid theological insights might be warranted. At any rate, the stress which the document makes on the redemption of the world through the cross of Christ reflects different and perhaps more adequate theological presuppositions, and at least, the document should strive for consistency.

One might urge, too, that this valid emphasis on the cross of Christ be clarified and expanded. For instance, the statement that redemption is the "basic motive of missionary effort" (p. 4) is confusing, since redemption is more likely the purpose or goal of the missionary effort. It is true that the redemptive activity of God revealed in the cross of Christ is the motive for mission, and this could be clearly stated as the document goes on to say that "The price of the redeeming gospel of Christ is the cross." Unfortunately, however, the document jumps too rapidly to pragmatic concerns in saying that "The strategy of world missions involves the sacrifice of life and money," so that the real grounding of missionary commitment in the dynamic love of God revealed in the suffering of Christ is left unexpressed.

Actually in its Christological statements, the documents would do well to ponder the suggestion of the World Council's pamphlet, "The Calling of the Church to Mission and to Unity," when it states that the unity and mission of the church "rests upon the whole redeeming work of Christ—past, present and future."² Certainly the message of the triumphant, risen Lord, present and ac-

² World Council of Churches. Central Committee, *The Calling of the Church—to Mission and to Unity* (New York: World Council of Churches, 1951).

tive in the militant advance of the church would be of significance for any theology of mission. It may be, of course, that the strategy document would prefer to 'de-mythologize' the notion of the return of Christ, yet the idea of the goal of history and the ultimate destiny of man therein implied seems of vast importance. Indeed, no strategy of world mission can ignore the questions of Christology and eschatology.

The attempt to give the strategy document a scriptural basis will be welcomed by the currently popular and vocal advocates of 'biblical theology.' The actual use of the Bible in the document will no doubt be a disappointment to most of them. In the main, the place of the New Testament is merely decorative. Quotations are used to introduce the sections of the document, but little attempt to relate the material within the sections to the biblical ideas quoted is to be found. For example, Paul's Macedonian vision (Acts 16:9) is cited as the heading for the section entitled "Mobility and Flexibility of Program" (p. 19) which proceeds to ground the strategy of mobility in utilitarian concerns rather than in revelatory experiences or biblical authority. One gets the impression that the writers of the strategy document decided what they wanted to say and then searched for some New Testament texts which might seem to have a certain vague relevance. As a matter of fact, they did not have to look far, since of seven such introductory quotations, three are to be found in Matthew. No citation from the Epistles is to be found, in spite of the fact that they are the primary documents of the early Christian mission. It is also disappointing that although all but two of the quotations in the strategy document are from the gospels, no citation from Mark appears, while every serious student of the New Testament knows that it is the earliest and best historical source for the life and ministry of Jesus. Similar oblivion to critical problems is displayed in the indiscriminate use of the 'Great Commission' (Matt. 28:19-20, p. 6) and the 'prayer of Jesus' (Jn. 17:18-21, p. 14) both of which are of doubtful authenticity.

What the strategy document lacks is a profound understanding and expression of the great theological motifs of the Bible. The mission of the church is grounded in the purpose and action of God the Creator who made man in his own image, free even to reject the God who had created him.³ And in the face of man's re-

³ Cf. T. A. Kantonen, *The Theology of Evangelism* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1954), pp. 23ff.

volt, it was this same God who redeemed a people out of slavery and elected them to serve his purpose of the salvation of the world.⁴ "But when the time had fully come," to this people, now disobedient to His covenant, "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" (Gal. 4:4). This Son, whom men called Jesus, "came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand'" (Mk. 1:14f.). The message of God which he announced was not a collection of words, but a deed, embodied in himself. This men realized fully only after witnessing his death and resurrection, so that they courageously cried, "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). With vivid hope these men of faith awaited his triumphant return, portraying it in the bright colors of oriental imagination, but what they intended by this visionary apocalypticism was a confession of faith: that in the end, God's redemptive purposes would ultimately succeed, "that God may be everything to every one" (I Cor. 15:28).

B. THE CHURCH AND THE MISSION

Very important to the strategy document is the idea of the church and its relation to the world mission of Christianity. Basically the church is understood in terms of its function rather than in abstract speculation about its nature; the doctrine of the church as expressed in the document is more existential than metaphysical. The essential function of the church is to be "the instrument of this witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (p. 3). "It exists for one purpose, to be completely obedient to its Lord, to carry out his work in the world" (p. 3). Thus, we may suppose, the church is the people of God commissioned to carry out His redemptive purposes which have been revealed in Jesus Christ.

Actually the term 'church' is used in three or four different ways in the document. 1) It is used to describe the 'church universal'—the whole "Christian world fellowship" (p. 4). At times this idea of the ecumenical church seems to suggest merely a co-operation among churches (cf. pp. 9f.), but generally the Church (note caps) is understood as the entire body of Christ throughout the world. Indeed, this unity is essential to the very nature of the church, for "division in the church . . . contradicts its own nature"

⁴ Cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: Kingsgate, 1944), pp. 9ff.

(p. 14). The unity of the church is found in Christ, and since Christ is not divided, a divided church is not the church.

2) The term 'church' is also used to refer to a body of believers in one local organization. This usage is implied when the document speaks of "every church" (p. 6), "autonomous churches" (p. 14), and "local churches" (p. 17).

3) The term 'church' is used for groups of congregations in geographical areas or in certain relationships to the missionary enterprise. Thus we read of "the church in the United States and Canada" and "the church in mission fields" (p. 8); a section of the document is entitled "Older and Younger Churches" (p. 11).

4) On a very few occasions the document uses the term 'church' to refer to Protestant denominations as when it speaks of "all church bodies" (p. 16) and refers to "councils and federations" of churches (p. 4).

In spite of this ambiguity of terminology, the document validly associates the mission of the church with the nature of the church. The mission is not some peripheral activity of the church, it is the essential function of the church which constitutes its very being. As the document says, "The church is mission" (p. 7). Moreover, the mission of the church is an expression of the essential unity of the church, since "The mission is given to the whole church" (p. 4). "No one of the three words, 'church,' 'unity,' and 'missions,' can be understood without the other two" (p. 4). Thus the real criterion by which any strategy or program of world missions is to be evaluated is a solid ecclesiology. Or in the command of the document, "Judge all activities in relation to the church" (p. 10).

This attempt to ground the mission of the church in the nature of the church will receive the approbation of most contemporary theologians. For instance, Paul Tillich writes that "the mission is a function which belongs to the Church itself; and it is an element, a basic element, in the life of the Church itself."⁵ Some theologians, however, will find the concept of the church as expressed in the strategy document to be lacking in clarity. Certainly an attempt to clarify the various uses of the term 'church' would improve the quality of the document. In biblical usage the word 'church' (ekklesia) is restricted to the local congregations and the universal fellowship of the body of Christ. Moreover, the universal church is not conceived as an aggregate of local congre-

⁵ Paul Tillich, "The Theology of Missions," *Occasional Bulletin of the Missionary Research Library*, V, No. 10, p. 3.

gations; rather, the local congregations are understood as expressions of the one people of God in a particular locality.⁸ The application of the term to denominations is without New Testament or theological support. Besides, when the document uses the word 'church' to describe some artificial segment of the church, it contradicts its own assertion that the church is essentially one and that division contradicts the very nature of the church. Especially unfortunate is the phrase 'older and younger churches,' for if the church is really one then it knows no geographical or temporal limitations. It seems also that the words carry unavoidably some connotations of priority and value judgment, and the conflicts between what are called 'older and younger churches' reflected in the document are derived in part from just such a psychology. At the very least, an attempt should be made at consistent capitalization, since within the document the word 'church' is found beginning with small and large letters indiscriminately even when it refers to the church ecumenical and universal.

Similarly, the stress on the importance of ecumenical cooperation, while in itself commendable, involves a certain ambiguity in relation to the document's own doctrine of the church. When we are told that "the interpretation of Christian missions must be cast within the framework of the reality of the fact that Christian fellowship through the world does exist," and that "the reality of this fellowship is best portrayed in the World Council of Churches, the International Missionary Council, councils and federations on the field, and the emerging movements toward Christian unity and the resulting partnership in the world churches," we wonder if the portrayal is adequate to describe the essential oneness of the church. Councils of churches are organizations through which some denominations (falsely called 'churches') express cooperation, and although such councils rightly are concerned with the unity of the church, their very existence as councils of churches is a denial of the reality of the one church. At their very best, the councils are limited expressions of the cooperation among some fragments of the church; they are much too small to portray the one true church—holy, catholic, and apostolic.

What the document really needs is a clear distinction between the essential ideal of the church and the reality of the church in

⁸ Cf. Karl Ludwig Schmidt, *The Church*, "Bible Key Words from Gerhard Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*" (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1950), p. 10.

its varied historical expressions. If it is to be insisted that a divided church is not the church, then no one in our time has a right to talk about the work of the church. If it is not possible to talk about the mission of the church without talking about the unity of the church, then the vast missionary projects of the 19th century Protestant denominations do not deserve to be called mission. Actually there is in essence one church composed of all the faithful people of God, but the historic expressions of that church are many and varied. None of these fragments is worthy of the name church, yet they attempt to express and to become in reality the church. Similarly, the mission of the church is grounded in the essential unity of the church, but even segments of the church can participate meaningfully even without a clear understanding of the church's unity and certainly apart from membership in the World Council of Churches.

Frank acknowledgement of this distinction would help to remove some of the ambiguities of the document. For example, when it says that "every church will feel called to become a missionary community" (p. 6), the document is obviously inconsistent with its own idea of the nature and mission of the church. By definition, the mission has to do with the essence of the church—no mission, no church. But how then can the document conceive of a church which does not yet feel called to become a missionary community? Or if we are to take the document seriously when it says that the church is mission, how are we to understand the statement on p. 19 about the "resources of the mission and the churches" which clearly implies that the mission and the church can be differentiated? What the document really is describing in these statements is the actual situation within the historic expressions of the church and its mission. The church as we know it in our time is striving to be the church; the mission is striving to be the mission. And to whatever extent church and mission approximate their true being, there the people of God to some degree validly participate in the work of God.

This distinction would also help to clarify the tension between the ideal of unity and the Disciple contention of unity on certain grounds of theology and polity. For all the embracing of unity and ecumenicity, the strategy document still insists that merger should be contemplated only on certain bases (pp. 15 ff.). Indeed, the churches on the field should maintain the Disciple witness and consult the officials of the United Christian Missionary Society before

participation in union movements. It is obvious that there is a tension between the passion for unity and the Disciple witness. One wonders, too, about the nature and authority of the United Society, since the document's doctrine of the church seems to posit no theological ground for such an organization. What needs to be frankly acknowledged is that the Christian Churches are one among many denominations who stand in contradiction to the essential unity of the church. Like all others, that denomination has organizations through which it strives to give genuine expression to the church. Indeed, one of the central purposes of this fragment of the church is the quest for Christian unity, so that the Disciples are involved in a contradiction which splits them to their roots. The Disciples are not the church, and their very existence is both a witness to and a denial of the church's oneness. The question as to whether or not the Disciples can witness to the unity of the church and still be Disciples remains. But at any rate, this fundamental contradiction ought to be made explicit within the document, and the seeming vacillation of being both for and against unity would thereby be somewhat clarified.

Some theologians, of course, will find the entire understanding of the church within the strategy document to reflect a woefully low and therefore inadequate ecclesiology. They will want to take the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ literally and perhaps suggest that the church is the extension of the incarnation.⁷ The weakness of this popular view ought to be apparent to anyone who observes that it implies the identification of the church and Christ. Actually there is a distinction between Christ and the church, and the latter becomes an embodiment of him only in so far as it is obedient to his will. But in reality the church in history has never been obedient fully and its weakness and fragmentation is proof enough that Christ is not therein incarnate. Similarly, the church is not to be identified with the kingdom of God, as the document implies on p. 23. The kingdom is the eternal rule of God which the church never adequately realizes in history, yet the church is the 'beachhead' through which the reign of God is coming into history. These attempts to identify the church and Christ or the kingdom are simply other examples of the attempt to understand the Christian community in terms of its ideal or transcendent aspect. It is true that the church is a divine institution,

⁷ Cf. William Robinson, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church* (rev. ed. St. Louis: Bethany, 1955), pp. 115ff.

one and holy in essence; but it is also an organization of men, divided and sinful in its life. This dual aspect of the church as both transcendent and immanent should be clearly recognized, for it is the theological basis for the distinction between the ideal of the church and its mission and the reality of the historic expressions of the church and its mission.

The document is right, however, when it attempts, as the New Testament, to understand the church in terms of its function. The Bible uses a variety of figures of speech (none of which should be literalized) to describe the nature of the Christian community. Practically all of these present the church as the assembly of men through which the holy God performs his work in the world. The church is the body of Christ—the corporate personality through which the redemptive purposes of God revealed in Jesus Christ are fulfilled. The church is the people of God—a union of men who belong to God whose essential life is to declare the wonderful deeds of him who called them out of darkness (I Pet. 2:9). With valid insight the document quotes Brunner: “The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning” (p. 7).

C. THE MESSAGE OF THE MISSION

Of central importance to the mission of the church is the gospel which the church is called to proclaim. Consequently the Strategy of World Missions stresses the importance of “our evangelistic witness” (p. 10) and the “Christian witness” (p. 12). There is a special section of the document entitled “The Mission and Evangelism” (p. 23). Unfortunately, the nature of the gospel is nowhere explained and the section on evangelism includes few theological concepts. The impression is given that evangelism is primarily the winning of men to the church (cf. pp. 12, 24), but the message which wins them is left unexpressed. When we read of the “revolutionary gospel of Jesus Christ” which is concerned with “the demand of men for a change in their lot, for freedom, for dignity, for human rights, for bread and for land” (p. 9), and when we are told of “the adequacy of the gospel of Jesus Christ to meet the problems of our troubled world” (p. 5), we are led to the conclusion that the gospel in the main is a message of political and economic justice. One wonders how this relates to winning men to the church of Jesus Christ, and why, if pragmatic concerns must pervade our thinking, the gospel should not be said to be concerned with the demand of men for eternal salvation.

This failure to define clearly the gospel on biblical and theological grounds is certainly one of the greatest weaknesses of the strategy document. We need to be reminded by Kantonen that "to understand the meaning of evangelism it is necessary to understand the evangel, the message which the church proclaims."⁸ Of course, defining the gospel is no easy task, as the current controversy over the nature of the early Christian *kerygma* indicates. This debate, however, is of crucial importance to those who are concerned with the message of the church, and particularly to Disciples who have continued to urge "the use of the Bible as a basis of church membership" (p. 16). In spite of differences, most contemporary biblical theologians understand the gospel as the dynamic proclamation of God's action in Christ in history for man's salvation.

Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel. . . . For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures (I Cor. 15:1ff.).

Of course the proclamation was not merely a recitation of historical data, it was a powerful announcement of what God had done in these events for the existence of man. Thus the preaching of the message was more than a description of past events, it became itself God's dynamic action in the present. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel," says Paul, "it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" (Rom. 1:16). Thus the missionary purports to proclaim nothing less than the saving word of God, and this is what gives his mission its power and urgency.

The gospel, then, is the declaration of God's forgiving grace in Jesus Christ—a declaration which demands a decision of faith. Apart from this good news men live in sin, that is, in estrangement and revolt against God. This is the root problem of our time of crisis, not some external political or economic conditions, although these are the bitter flowers of that root. The decision of faith or commitment to God's personal revelation in Christ opens man up to God's creative power so that he can participate in the new being. And although this decision must be freely made by each individual, it must be a response of his total existence which per-

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

meates his whole life and all its relationships—social, economic, political. Amos Wilder is right when he says “Individual and social salvation go together.”⁹ Moreover, declaration of this saving message involves more than verbal communication, for as the document correctly states, the church is called upon “To demonstrate the gospel in its life as well as in its preaching” (p. 14). Indeed, the ethical character of the Christian and the total life of the Christian community in worship and fellowship must demonstrate with clarity the redemptive power of God to all men in a way which is relevant for their whole existence and all its cultural relationships.

D. THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Since the Strategy of World Missions proposes to formulate a basic policy of missionary practice for a particular denomination, the question ought to be raised as to whether that strategy can or should reflect the thought and polity of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ). Apparently the document itself would answer in the affirmative. It states that “It is the purpose of the Society and all its missionaries to establish self-reliant churches that embody the teachings of the New Testament and the ideals of our Lord” (p. 12), and insists that the values of the Disciple witness ought to be retained (pp. 14 ff.). Among those items of witness which appear to be of supreme importance is the concept of congregational freedom, or to use the oft-repeated term of the document, the ‘autonomy’ of the local church. This congregational form of church government, we are told, is a “fundamental New Testament principle” (p. 11). Also receiving Scriptural sanction seem to be other Disciple freedoms such as freedom to oppose creedalism, to baptize by immersion, to practice open communion.

There is an obvious attempt here to relate the strategy of missions to denominational tradition, and this is as it should be; the attempt to launch the mission of the church apart from some specific base of operations on the common ground of a particular faith and practice is in our time clearly impossible. Nevertheless, this attempt as reflected in the document is not without ambiguity, for the document has not adequately assessed and clearly expressed the real center of Disciple thought. Probably because they have noted the dual stress on restoration and unity throughout Disciple history, the framers of the document have attempted, although

⁹ Amos N. Wilder, *New Testament Faith for Today* (New York: Harper, 1955), p. 140.

with some ambiguity, to emphasize both biblical authority and ecumenicity. Traditionally, Disciples have urged the unity of the church through the restoring of the New Testament 'pattern' of life and doctrine. Recent biblical and theological studies, however, have convinced many of Alexander Campbell's followers that the New Testament reveals no sharply-drawn blueprint of the church, and even if it did this kind of restoration would be neither possible nor practical. Besides, as C. C. Morrison has shown, the Disciples possess nothing unique in the concept of restorationism.¹⁰ Consequently the authors of the strategy document avoid any direct approval of the restoration ideal, while they pay a certain lip service to it through an ambiguous assumption of biblical authority. This leads to confusion and demonstrates a slight lack of integrity.

While the restoration concept has been largely lost, the document continues to stress the Disciple ideal of unity; this, as we have seen, has led to a certain tension between the Disciple witness and church union. But, if restorationism has been abandoned, what then is the basis of the Disciple plea for the unity of God's people? The document has decided that it consists in the vague but glowing term 'freedom.' "The strength of the Disciples of Christ," we are told, "has been in their freedom" (p. 16). Quite apart from the fact that Disciple history and current practice often belie this conclusion—note for example the document's own reluctance to allow the autonomy of the churches on the mission field to enter into merger movements (cf. p. 17)—it is still questionable that freedom is the real theological basis of the Disciple movement. What is unique about a concept which has been practiced longer and more vigorously by Baptists and Congregationalists? That congregational government is a fundamental New Testament principle is at best debatable; that the idea of freedom tends to ground the church more in anthropology than in theology ought to be obvious.

The real center of Disciple theology, however, is its Christology. The ancient slogan, 'No creed but Christ,' implies more than just "the freedom of the congregation to refuse a creed as a test of fellowship" (p. 18). It is a profound theological confession which insists that truth is not creedal or doctrinaire in character; truth is revealed in a person and received in personal commitment. This

¹⁰ Charles Clayton Morrison, *The Unfinished Reformation* (New York: Harper, 1953), pp. 130ff.

is reflected in the Disciple concern for a name which honors Christ, even though 'Disciples of Christ' or 'Christian Churches' are not 'biblical names for biblical things'; the New Testament prefers 'church or assembly of God.' Still more important is the confession of faith which has become the almost universal formula for accepting members into the movement: "I believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and I confess him as my Lord and Saviour."

It is this center which ought to determine all Disciple thought and guide all missionary practice. The emphasis on Christ makes possible a genuine understanding of biblical authority, for the Bible is the prior historical witness to God's revelation in Christ and man's response in faith; all subsequent revelation is dependent and secondary. The emphasis on Christ also makes possible a genuine understanding of the ideal of unity and the concept of freedom. Since Christ is not a creed but a person, and since faith is not a legalistic but a personal response, it is clear that unity must be found in diversity, that freedom is a prerequisite for faith. There is a oneness in Christ, but the expression of that unity demands a variety of historical expressions. The Disciples, therefore, must not crystallize their own understanding of the proper response, but let all of their thought and practice stand under the judgment of Christ.

A CONSIDERATION OF WORLD AND MISSION IN RELATION TO THE STRATEGY DOCUMENT

By WILLIAM BARR

A THEOLOGICAL understanding of the world is a necessary background for the Division of World Mission's basic policy document *Strategy of World Missions* and for any other discussion of the theology and strategy of the Christian mission. Of course, a theological understanding of the world is always secondary to an understanding of the Gospel, and the nature of the world can only be truly seen in the light of the Gospel. Still, a theological understanding of the world is of critical importance, for it is within this context that the Gospel is received and it is that to which it is to be proclaimed. The Christian mission is at the heart of the Gospel itself; therefore, an understanding of the Gospel and the world may be distinguished but never separated.

In this paper we shall attempt to raise certain points at which a more adequate theological understanding of the world is needed by aiming at three principal objectives: namely, 1) to explore the implications of references to the world in the Division of World Mission's basic policy document *Strategy of World Missions*, 2) to discuss points at which amplification, clarification, and/or modification is needed, and 3) to suggest the bearing that a more adequate theological understanding of the world in terms of the Christian mission should have on the practical strategy of carrying out that mission.

MEANING OF "WORLD"

The meaning of the term "world" as it is used in the basic policy document is highly ambiguous. The word is used in several different senses often within the same section of the document and sometimes within the same paragraph.

Perhaps most often the term is used as a synonym for the phrase "all individual persons," or "all men" (pp. 3 and 4), or "the whole world" (p. 14), or "the peoples of the earth today" (p. 19). The world seems to be thought of here as a collection of a multitude of individual persons.

Another frequent use of the word is much more inclusive than simply a collection of persons. The Christian "is thrust into the world" (p. 4); and he finds himself in a "troubled world" (p. 5),

a "revolutionary world" (pp. 5 and 8), a "world in which other faiths of revolutionary power confront us in the full tide of victory" (p. 6). Here "world" seems to refer to those structures—economic, political, social and religious (and the list could be indefinitely expanded to include languages, customs, etc.)—which bind the human world together, even while separating it in conflict. In this sense the word, "world" and "culture" are practically synonymous.

But the document uses the term in still another sense when it speaks of "world-wide fellowship" (p. 6) and "the world-wide mission of the church" (p. 7). It seems that the phrases "world concept" (pp. 5 and 7), "world conferences" (p. 5), "world meeting" (p. 6), and "world mission" (pp. 5, 6, 25 and 27) are used in this same sense, meaning the quantitative measure or scope of the word it modifies.

Still again, the word "world" is indirectly suggested in the sense of the totality of God's creation when the document speaks of the human world as "a part of God's creation" (p. 4).

Apart from these meanings of the word "world" in the document, it is used in a number of ambiguous phrases, such as "Christian fellowship through the world" (p. 4), "world churches" (p. 4), "world redemption" (p. 4) and "redeem the world" (p. 8), where the meaning is uncertain and obscure. Perhaps some theological implications underlie some of the phrases, but if so the phrases themselves are so ambiguous that it is impossible to deal with them critically. The phrase "a world of revolution" (p. 8) is at best badly worded; and the assertion, "The mission is the whole world" (p. 7) may mean that the mission is "everything that relates to the whole task of the whole church to bring the Gospel to the whole world" (*The calling of the Church—to Mission and to Unity*, W.C.C., p. 5), but as it is strictly stated the assertion is clearly meaningless.

The different meanings of the word "world" and the confusion in its usage in the basic policy document may be somewhat excused on the ground that the ordinary, daily usage of the word is also ambiguous. In common usage "world" may mean 1) the universe in its physical existence, or as in pantheism, in its physical and spiritual existence, 2) the totality of mankind, 3) human culture, and 4) a particular sphere of thought and life, or 5) a combination of these or even other references.

Also, there appears to be ambiguity in the biblical use of the word. However, it is clear that whether the biblical usage of the term refers to the physical universe, human culture, or the dynamic history of a people or peoples, the central meaning of the word "world" for the biblical writers was the work of God as Creator. "The affirmation of the Bible that God created heaven and earth, and that his creation is 'very good' (Gen. 1:31) must be our point of departure in the discussion of what is meant by the 'world.' The 'world' means, generally speaking, the totality of God's creation."¹ But this rather abstract definition of the word must be made specific and concrete if the meaning of "world" is to be made clear. We must ask what it means to speak of God as Creator and of the world as His creation. Dr. Tillich has written, "The doctrine of creation is the answer to the question implied in the creature as creature."² Or, in other words, one may say that "biblical-Hebraic thinking sees man and his existence primarily in the context of history."³

When he attempts to define the meaning of history, man is really attempting to define the meaning of his own life. Human life is not simply lived *in* history, in the context of time; it is lived *as* history, as a temporal process in and through which the 'nature and destiny' of the individual emerges in its full significance. In other words, history is the stuff of life, and any inquiry into the meaning of life becomes, at some stage, an inquiry into the meaning of that ongoing process of life, individual and collective, which we call history.⁴

But it must be clear that history as it is used in this context does not mean simply a temporal series of events (which is its ordinary meaning), but it means life as seen in both a "vertical" and a "horizontal" dimension as total and ultimate, as that context in which God meets man. More exactly, it is "one's *redemptive history* (Heilsgeschichte), for it is that history in terms of which the

¹ "The Lordship of Christ over the World and the Church," Study Documents produced under the auspices of Division of Studies, World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland, p. 14.

² Tillich, Paul, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, c. 1951, p. 252.

³ Herberg, Will, "Faith, History, and Self-Understanding," *Christianity and Society*, vol. 19, No. 2, Spring, 1954 p. 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

ultimate meaning of life is established.”⁵ At the same time, the “biblical conception of the world would not appear to deny in any sense the validity of a distinction between ‘nature’ and ‘history,’ although the Bible makes no such distinction.”⁶ Rather, it goes beyond (and prior to, as it were) this distinction to conceive of the world as man in his historical existence.

If the general outline of the above discussion is valid, then it seems that at least three conclusions must follow when we compare the biblical meaning of “world” with those of common usage and those implied in the basic policy document: 1) The biblical meaning of “world” goes far beyond reference to an individual or a collection of individuals as such, that is, simply a number of separate beings. The biblical meaning also goes deeper than personality conceived as simply a psychological *gestalt*, at least in the terms in which this concept is expressed in technical psychological study. This is to say that the biblical understanding of the word “world” cannot be simply equated with “all men,” unless it is made clear that the phrase “all men” is not being used in its ordinary sense and that its meaning is much more profound. 2) The biblical meaning of “world” also goes far beyond reference simply to human culture, or a particular sphere of culture, unless again, culture is assigned a much more profound meaning than it ordinarily carries in common human communication. The form and structures of man’s existence as such, which I take in the ordinary meaning of “culture,” do not include the depth or totality of his historical existence, although certainly they are grounded in and reflect his total existence. But it is just to man in the totality and ultimacy of his historical existence that the Bible speaks when it talks of “God’s world,” “God’s creation.” 3) Therefore, it is obvious that the biblical meaning of “world” is more profound and more inclusive than the other meanings we have considered. It is to the depths and fullness of human existence that the biblical writers refer when they speak of the world; it is to man in his historical existence before God.

It would almost seem that an apology is due for such a lengthy discussion of the technical meaning of the word “world”; however, such a discussion is justified on many grounds, some of the most important of which (for our purposes) are the frequency of the use of the word in current discussions of the theology of mission,

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, “The Lordship of Christ over the World and the Church,” p. 18.

the necessity for a clear understanding of its meaning in discussing the nature of the world today in which the mission is received and carried out, and especially the importance of the meaning and its implications for the strategy of mission in the context of the whole theology of mission.

THE NATURE OF THE WORLD

Whatever may be the final outcome of our linguistic conventions and understanding concerning the reference of the word "world," certain aspects of the contemporary scene impress themselves upon us with a special vividness. We find ourselves involved in the movement of rapid social and cultural change. There are no grandstand or bleacher seats available in this total struggle in which we are all engaged. Everyone, as well as the Christian, is "thrust into the world" (p. 4) to take up his task where he finds himself; but the Christian has the more total responsibility for it is just there—and not elsewhere—that he is called to serve his Lord.

Beyond the colorful, trite adjectives that fill the speech and writing of the politicians, newspapermen and essayists who attempt to comment on the current situation, we find ourselves caught up a situation of dynamic—at times, even violent—change. "The whole world is in . . . a state of flux" (p. 8); we live in a world in revolution (p. 5). A whole host of factors have converged to fill the world with feverish desire and activity, as well as loneliness and estrangement.⁷ But it is not the change alone which disturbs us, although at this rate it is frightening enough; rather, it is the deep divisions which cut people off from one another and fill them with strangeness and hatred for each other, these barriers (p. 14) that criss-cross throughout the world. And behind these barriers rise the fanatical faiths, socio-political, economic, and religious, both old and new, "of revolutionary power" which "confront us in the full tide of victory, faiths which have won swift and sweeping triumphs, and which present to the Christian missionary movement a challenge more searching than any it has faced since the rise of Islam" (p. 6).

What are some of these faiths that challenge and command the allegiance of increasing numbers of people in our day and that stand often in rugged opposition to the proclamation of the Chris-

⁷ Cf. Jaspers, Karl, *Man in the Modern Age*, Doubleday Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, New York, c. 1957, especially pp. 41-71.

tian Gospel? One of the most revolutionary movements in our day is the growing demand for nationalism. The persistent and age-long "demand of men for a change in their lot, for freedom, for dignity, for human rights, for bread and for land" (p. 9) is finding articulate expression in the increasing demand of subject peoples for national freedom and self determination (e.g., Algeria) and the demand of younger nations for a real voice and status in international affairs.

At least three features characterize this aspect of the revolution in which we live: 1) "the emergence of new nations in Asia and Africa and the increasing influence of their peoples in world affairs; the end of the period of western economic and political domination"; 2) "the determined efforts of these countries to achieve economic and social development through industrialization and through campaigns for advancement in education, health, and in other areas of human welfare, involving, eventually, the search for completely new patterns of society"; and 3) "the constantly accelerating technical and industrial revolution in the West and the effect of this in accentuating the disruptive nature of change upon society in Asia, Africa, and Latin America."⁸

Despite the magnitude and the importance even for the physical well-being of the world of the opportunities and responsibilities of this revolutionary movement, its significance has hardly penetrated the thought of the West. The starving Asiatic has become a picture vivid in our minds through humanitarian and missionary propaganda, and certainly we must never forget him; but he is not the one who stands at the center of this faith and revolution. As M. Richard Shaull has pointed out, "We often think that if people only had enough to eat, the flame of revolution would die out. The facts prove this to be a very serious error. The common man today wants to feel a new sense of dignity and responsibility that comes from the possession of power; he demands the privilege of helping to control the economic and political forces which dominate his life, and will give his support to that political movement which offers to satisfy this ambition."⁹ And nationalism, he feels, offers to satisfy this ambition.

⁸ "The Life and Mission of the Church," special issue of the Federation News, World's Student Christian Federation, No. 5, 1957, p. 23.

⁹ Shaull, M. Richard, *Encounter with Revolution*, A Haddam House Book, Association Press, New York, c. 1955, pp. 7-8.

But it should be pointed out that nationalism, in the sense in which it has been described above and in the sense with which the term is commonly used, is an ideal of political independence of peoples of more-or-less social homogeneity. In the basic policy document, however, "nationalism" at times seems to mean something much more profound (although its usage in the document is confusing); it apparently is referred to on the one hand as a cultural phenomenon (p. 8 and 20-21?) and on the other hand as a faith (p. 15 "the newer faiths of communism or nationalism"). Now, this distinction is quite important, for as a faith nationalism is a finite thing given infinite significance and as such it is an idol and directly opposed to the Christian proclamation, but as a political ideal recognized as finite but perhaps legitimate and necessary for the achievement and maintenance of justice in the international political context it is not opposed to the proclamation of the Gospel, rather the Gospel lays ethical imperative upon those who receive it to act responsibly in this situation, which may result in demands for nationalism of this latter sort.

A faith the West is more familiar with, or at least feels itself to be so, and one that has thrown a forthright challenge at the Christian proclamation is communism; but again the distinction must be made between communism as simply a socio-political ideal and communism as a faith.

That this ideology which sums up all things in terms of a philosophy of economic determinism and dialectical materialism may be really a crypto-religious faith Dr. Tobias has pointed out in his study *Communist-Christian Encounter in East Europe*. He shows the uneasy conscience of the communist as he faces Christianity, particularly in the form of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Russia, and the varying attitudes from open hostility to the attempt to effect a kind of compromise with the Christian faith to the present attitude of peaceful co-existence, provided the church observes certain limitations in its ministry, which communism has adopted in the encounter with the Christian witness.¹⁰

However, its materialistic faith is only one side of the force of communism and it should not be confused with the other side which is a thorough-going socio-political program of radical change in the structures of society, at least in capitalist society, although these two sides of communism are generally inseparably bound

¹⁰ Tobias, Robert, *Communist-Christian Encounter in East Europe*, School of Religion Press, Indianapolis, c. 1956, pp. 107-118.

together. It is important to make this distinction, for, as Dr. Tillich has pointed out, "Marxism is a movement of social justice against a conservative system of political and ecclesiastical hierarchies which were identical at the top and worked together on every level. . . . It was conquest from within, not by an irreligious system but by a religion of social justice in secular terms." It is this passion for social justice which was "the infinite concern of those who under tremendous suffering had prepared the revolution and carried it through."¹¹ And the church in Russia in articulating what she believes to be her privilege and task in this situation has urged again and again the importance of this distinction. In witnessing to a communist society, Josef Hromadka has said, the church must "preach the Gospel in a positive way, not obscuring the ideological differences between Christianity and Communism but subjecting the Communists to a helpful critique. . . . The Church must assist with her prayers and the activity of her members the building of a socialist society to the end that exploitation, injustice, and violence be abolished and a classless society be created. She must 'help the aspiration' of the Communists and 'purify them of human faults.' "¹²

In the basic policy document *Strategy of World Missions* this distinction between the materialistic faith of communism and its socio-political program of radical reform is not made clear, although it is obvious that some such distinction lies in the background thinking of the document. For at times communism is said to throw obstacles in the way of carrying out the missionary work (p. 20) and to cause difficulties in the proclaiming of the Gospel (p. 20), which necessitates unusual adjustments in some areas of the work (p. 8), which seems to refer to the socio-political impact of communism; while at other times direct reference is made to the materialistic faith of communism (p. 14), which is seen as the major threat to the mission (p. 6).

Besides the onslaught of the relatively new faiths of nationalism and communism, there is currently a revival of the so-called "great ethnic religions." "Buddhists, for example, have set up a training college to train missionaries, and formulated a five-year plan for sending out 2,000 missionaries on a mission to save man-

¹¹ Tillich, Paul, *Theology of Culture*, Oxford University Press, New York, c. 1959, p. 183.

¹² West, Charles C., *Communism and the Theologians*, SCM Press, Ltd., London, England, First published 1958, p. 71.

kind from the Christianity which has failed to prevent the Christian nations from involving the world in two world wars, with the threat of a third and far worse one to come. In India, Hinduism is beginning with some force to question the propriety of Christian missions on specifically religious grounds. And if we turn to the more 'primitive' religions, can it be doubted that the Mau Mau outbreak in Kenya was in part at least an anti-Christian religious response from the original faith of the Kikuyu."¹³ Even here in the United States we see the growth of Oriental religions and faiths transplanted and interpreted to and within Western culture. Perhaps the most conspicuous example of this at present is the vitality and eager reception in some few quarters of Zen Buddhism. Yet in the process of this transplanting it becomes clearer just how closely a particular faith is related to the culture in which it expresses itself.

If we ask what is the nature and the scope of the challenge these religious faiths present in encounter with the Christian proclamation and what should be the relationship between them, we at one find ourselves in the midst of a heated debate which has proceeded with great vigor at least since the second World Missionary Conference held at Jerusalem in 1928, where, as Wilhelm Andersen has put it, "No longer, as at Edinburgh, was the right of the Christian Churches to carry on missionary operations in the non-Christian world taken as something in itself self-evident."¹⁴ The basic policy document does not speak directly to this particular problem. In the opening sections it states, "All men are a part of God's creation and all are included in the great purpose effected on Calvary. The church cannot rest in its global task until its witness has been carried to the uttermost part, and to all in every part" (p. 4). But implications in later sections of the document are ambiguous. On the one hand, it is asserted that the "Christian community is small, an isolated oasis in the desert of paganism of ancient religious cultures" (p. 14). On the other hand, the document stresses the necessity for relating the Gospel to the life of the people when it urges missionaries to "identify themselves with the people whom they serve" (p. 13 and *passim*) (which statement is rather ambiguous in itself) and grants freedom to the younger

¹³ *Op. cit.*, "The Life and Mission of the Church," p. 27.

¹⁴ Anderson, Wilhelm, *Towards a Theology of Mission*, SCM Press Ltd., London, England, First published 1955, p. 23.

churches to develop a life and tradition in terms of its own cultural situation (pp. 11 and 24).

In addition to tension created by the impact and expansion of nationalism, communism and the older religious faiths, a number of other factors are integrally bound-up in the present world struggle. Perhaps chief among them is the rapid growth and vast movement of population, due to the wars and other causes (pp. 10 and 20-21). In the midst of social disruptions and an increasingly industrialized society, there appear large areas of desperate need for food, housing, hospitals, schools (pp. 9 and 21). As the demands for freedom and justice for all peoples becomes conscious and articulate and as persons are crowded together in large metropolitan centers, the whole racial problem becomes more acute and is often intensified through deep hatreds and violence. And underlying all the more immediate concerns of persons in this world in rapid social change is an increasingly insidious secularism, an almost overwhelming pressure to orient one's life wholly in terms of his physical and cultural environment (pp. 6 and 20).

These appear to be the general characteristics of the secular world which confront the Christian Gospel that are implied in the basic policy document. There is confusion, it seems, in the document between factors such as the movement of population, changing socio-political structures, which have a more-or-less pragmatic significance and factors such as the materialistic faith of nationalism, communism, and secularism and the faiths of the non-Christian religions. Although these two kinds of factors are inter-related, to be sure, still there is an important distinction to be made between them. Yet, even this second kind of factors is treated more-or-less entirely pragmatically in the document. This is clear when the document dismisses nationalism, communism, and other religions either by simply rejecting them or by considering them as "obstacles" in the effort to carry out the Christian mission. There seems to be little understanding of these opposing faiths as more than "religious cultures" or socio-political ideologies but as thorough attempts of persons to speak out of the depths of their historical existence. It is hard for us to realize, as Dr. West has pointed out in discussing Reinhold Niebuhr's theological encounter with communism, that our "'realism' transported out of an Anglo-Saxon environment sounds to others like ideology."¹⁵

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, *Communism and the Theologians*, p. 168.

Perhaps one of the main reasons for this limitation of the document is the ambiguous conception of the world which underlies it and which has been discussed above. If the world is conceived simply as the complex structure and movement of human culture, then the faiths that confront the Christian mission are simply peculiar cultural configurations and the Gospel is addresses to them as such. However, it would seem that the biblical understanding of the world is the only one really relevant at this point of encounter between the Gospel and the world. If this is so, then we must view the world in much more ultimate terms than simply the forms and structures of human culture. We must see the dynamic power and allegiance to these opposing faiths as the expression of man's attempt to deal with the fundamental issues of his own life; these are not "external" to him; he is wrestling with the very heart of his nature and destiny. Over thirty years ago, the novelist D. H. Lawrence gave voice to this struggle when he wrote: "The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habits, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth road into the future: but we go round, or scrambel over the obstacles. We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen."¹⁶ And in our own day another novelist, Samuel Beckett, speaks for many of our time when he writes: "I listen and the voice is of a world collapsing endlessly, a frozen world, under a faint untroubled sky, enough to see by, yes, and frozen too. . . . And it says that here nothing stirs, has never stirred, will never stir, except myself, who do not stir either, when I am there, but see and am seen."¹⁷ Regardless of what these persons are actually saying, I think it is clear that what we see here are persons speaking from beyond their cultural context, out of the depths—often strange and horrible depths—of their existence. It is this depth of the challenge of the opposing faiths that the document doesn't make clear and that is necessary to a more adequate theological understanding of the world in a theology of mission.

But what is the place of such an understanding of these faiths in a theological perspective of the world? And how does the Christian Gospel meet the challenge they present in such a dimension? Within the limitations of this paper it is only possible to indicate in some way the direction that such a further discussion might

¹⁶ Lawrence, D. H., *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Pocket Books Inc., New York, c. 1959 (text of the 1928 Italian edition), p. 1.

¹⁷ Beckett, Samuel, *Molloy*, Grove Press, Inc., New York, c. 1955, p. 53.

take. The basic policy document is right, I think, in pointing out that vital questions which concern persons today are couched within the framework of a particular set of presuppositions and attitudes, which often makes the Christian Gospel appear fantastic. However, these presuppositions are not always materialistic; they may reach to the utmost moral and social idealism and to the limits of contemplative mysticism. It is a mistake to view man's particular historical quest as separate from his actual historical existence. Therefore, it is to man in his individual and collective historical existence that the Christian proclamation is addressed as the new life, the new being God offers persons through Jesus Christ, His Incarnation, His death on the Cross, and His Resurrection (see pp. 6 and 7). It is through God's mighty acts, through His divine self-revelation that he calls His church into being to participate in His mission for the redemption of persons in their historical existence. Hence, as Dr. Hartenstein writes in reporting on the World Missionary Conference at Willingen, "It is impossible to speak rightly of the Church, without speaking of its mission to the world. The Church exists in its missionary activity."¹⁸

Here, then, we see the urgency of the Christian mission. It does not lie in the necessity for easing the tensions in a world locked in ideological conflict, or for solving the problems of an industrial society, or even, for that matter, for meeting the need for moral and spiritual leadership of all people. But it is in the very nature of God Himself in His self-revelation that the imperative of mission lies. As the World Council of Churches document *Theology for Evangelism* states it: "God is a missionary God." He Who has given Himself to us in Jesus as the Christ has claimed us in the whole of our existence to participate with Him in His mission to the world.

The claim that God lays upon the Christian through Christ is a claim that is laid upon every Christian. Therefore, it is impossible that God's mission can be relegated to certain specifically selected people within the life and ministry of the church. Every Christian, insofar as he is a Christian, is a missionary. This is not to deny the necessary role of those persons in the life of the church with specialized skills who are called to serve in places of particular need both at home and abroad, but it is to affirm that God's mission is given to the whole church and not to just a seg-

¹⁸ Hartenstein, K., et al., *Mission zwischen Gestern und Morgen*, Stuttgart, c. 1952, p. 63, as quoted in Andersen, *Towards a Theology of Mission* p. 54.

ment of its membership. For the Christian is a member of "those who have been grasped by God's action, and know that their witness in word, deed, and oneness is the reflex of their faith-relation to the Lord of life. They live in order to reach out to all men everywhere, claiming them for their rightful Lord."¹⁹

God's mission is to the world, to man in the totality of his historical existence; and it is in this mission to the totality of life that the Christian participates. As Dr. Newbigin has said: "He who is sent to make Christ known and obeyed as Lord among those who do not so know and obey Him is a missionary, whether his journey be long or short. The missionary frontier runs through every land where there are communities living without the knowledge of Christ as Lord."²⁰ And, one might add, the missionary frontier runs through every area, aspect, and decision of life where Christ is not acknowledged as Lord. The missionary frontier is not geographical; it is spiritual. It is the frontier between faith in Christ as Lord, and unbelief.²¹ But this means unbelief not simply in intellectual terms but in "existential" terms, unbelief that is a refusal to accept Christ as Lord and serve Him in the world. Here is where God confronts man, and thus here is where the missionary must confront him, also. It is just here that men must hear and receive the Word which is life. This is the urgency of the mission, the urgency of God's love for His creation.

THE WORLD AND THE STRATEGY OF THE MISSION

An understanding of the biblical conception of the world and a view of our contemporary world from that perspective have far-reaching implications for the strategy of the world mission (God's mission to His world in which the church is called to participate) as it manifests itself in the culture in particular missions (structures through which the church seeks to carry out her calling).

There will be a deepened theological understanding and motive behind the strategy of the mission. The church must constantly be aware and on guard against interpreting her call to mission wholly in terms of propagating her own ecclesiastical structures and functions. The church must be quite clear on the point that she does not receive her mission from herself, but rather that she partici-

¹⁹ "Theology for Evangelism," Dept. on Evangelism, Division of Studies, World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland, May 1958, p. 4.

²⁰ Newbigin, Lesslie, *One Body, One Gospel, One Word*, Wm. Carling & Co. Ltd., London, England, First published 1958, p. 29.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

pates in the mission of God to redeem the world. It is from Him that she receives her task and it is to Him that she must look for wisdom and guidance.

The strategy of the mission will be permeated by a renewed sense of the urgency of the task of the mission. In a world shot-through with despair and fanatic aspirations and demands, where persons needing bread receive only stones, the church must hear the call to her from Him who is already there working to fulfill His purposes to take up the task He has given her in and to the world. To obey the call by which she lives may demand entirely new structures and functions in the life of the church. If the church is to confront the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ in the life of suburban developments, colleges and universities, political and social organizations, and many other areas of life here and abroad, she must, in many cases, be ready to step out of her traditional patterns of life and work into patterns of greater mobility and flexibility (p. 20). And if the final test of her structure is the effectiveness of her witness (p. 20), then it is an effectiveness calculated not in terms of "additions" to the church but in terms of the task she has been given and the Gospel she has been called to proclaim.

Finally, there are important implications for the strategy of world mission following a more adequate theological understanding of the world in relation to the mission and social and political tensions. The church cannot ignore this aspect of the life of persons, for she finds her Lord already at work in these very areas of life and the Good News she proclaims is to the whole of human existence, not just to some special part of life labelled "religious" or "spiritual." She is essentially involved in the struggle for justice and human rights. It is imperative that the church realizes that a necessary aspect of the proclamation given her is service in and to the world, that she has a deep responsibility to work for the improvement of economic conditions of all peoples, to help the nations, and especially the younger nations, develop new structures of social, economic, and political life which will be more adequate to the conditions of the modern world, while at the same time speaking to persons in the depth of their historical existence of God's judgment and mercy.

Undoubtedly there are many other implications which follow from a more adequate theological understanding of the world and the mission for the strategy of the Christian mission. But perhaps

these suggestions will be of help in pointing the way such further discussion might proceed.

In closing, it might be well to point out that there has been no attempt made in this paper to elaborate what has been referred to here as "an adequate theological understanding of the world." The scope of the paper has been far more limited; it has been an attempt to describe some points raised in the basic policy document at which a more adequate theological understanding of the world is needed and to suggest some implications such an understanding might have in terms of the strategy of the mission. The argument has been put forward that we must have a clearer and more adequate theological understanding of the world in order to understand the nature of the mission and its implications for the life of the churches.

SOME BEGINNING QUESTIONS

1. What is the authority for missions and evangelism? Does the driving force of missions derive from "ends" or inspiration? (cf. Oxford Conference, 1937)
2. What is the real urgency of missions—in relation to the work of Christ? in relation to world order? in relation to death? in relation to the final end of everything?
3. What is the theological base of *world* mission? What is the significance for missions of an enlarged and deepened concept of world (Romans VIII, contemporary space science)?
4. What is the relation between proclaiming and result in terms of motive, between intention and expectation, between redemption given and salvation to be won?
5. What is the nature of faith, what is the way of God's dealing with man, and what relevance has this for missions?
6. What are the respective roles of "missioners," of God, Holy Spirit, church in missions?
7. Should missions concentrate on individual conversion, church establishment, or something else still?
8. As regards Disciples, by what process can we take responsible decisions concerning missions? what criteria? Does the vocation of Disciples in mission spring from some distinctive position? What presuppositions, process and substance are here involved?

SOME WORKING MATERIALS

1. *The Calling of the Church to Mission and to Unity*, Central Committee, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1951.
2. *Theology for Evangelism* (a Study Document Prepared by an International Consultation Organized by the Department and Offered for Criticism and Comment), World Council of Churches, Department of Evangelism, Geneva, May, 1958.
3. *A Theological Reflection on the Work of Evangelism, Bulletin, Vol. V, Nos. 1 and 2*, Division of Studies, World Council of Churches, Geneva, November, 1959.
4. "A Spontaneous Missionary Church," *Bulletin of the Department on the Laity, No. 4*, World Council of Churches, Geneva, November, 1957 (see also other issues for pertinent articles).
5. Andersen, Wilhelm, *Towards a Theology of Mission*, SCM Press, London, 1955 (see also his reading list, pp. 63-64).
6. Hoekendijk, J. C., "The Church in Missionary Thinking," *International Review of Missions*, London, July, 1952.
7. Kraemer, Hendrik, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, Edinburgh House, London, 1938.
8. Newbigin, Lesslie, *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, Wm. Carling & Co., London, 1958.
9. Tillich, Paul, "The Theology of Missions," *Occasional Bulletin of the Missionary Research Library, Vol. V, No. 10*, New York, 1954.
10. *International Review of Missions, passim*, International Missionary Council, New York.
11. *Bibliography of the Theology of Missions in the Twentieth Century*, compiled by Gerald H. Anderson, Missionary Research Library, New York, 1958.